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AUTUMN MANŒUVRES.

BY
MRS. M. MOORE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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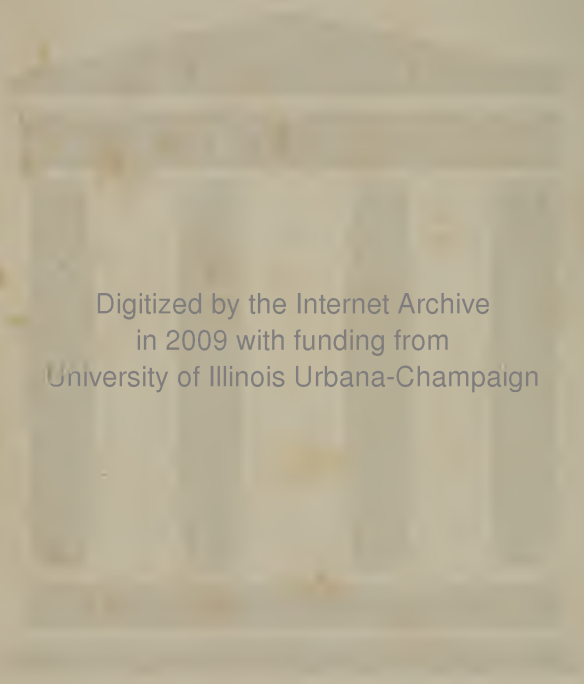
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AUTUMN MANŒUVRES.



CHAPTER I.

OLD FRIENDS.

COLONEL BATHURST was strolling meditatively in Piccadilly on a Sunday afternoon early in September. He had chosen the sunny side, and was just realizing that it was the conventional period for “nobody” to be in town, and that here he was. This was his fifth day in London, and, with the exception of a few *habitués* of his club, who always remained rooted to the spot, he had seen no one whom he knew.

His reflections took a rather melancholy turn, when he remembered there had been

days when he could have put his hand upon the shoulder of many a good fellow rife with the energy of youth for the pleasures of the day. Yes ; he had it all before him—

“ The smiles, the tears of boyhood’s years,
The friends so linked together.”

He felt

“ Like one who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted.”

But although there was sadness in the reflection of the “light of other days,” it was not of that overpowering nature which could destroy the pleasure of this glorious afternoon.

Colonel Bathurst was fully aware that he had seen the sun rise on his fortieth birthday—and on several following days, if that were all.

“ And it isn’t every man who can boast of having seen the sun rise, except by accident, at my age,” thought he.

While he plumed himself with this idea,

his carriage becoming naturally more erect, as it always does with self-satisfaction, his absent eye alighted on a passing face, and woke in an instant to recognition.

“ O’Buncous ! ”

“ Bathurst ! ”

The exclamations were simultaneous. The two men grasped hands, and immediately made a rapid, half-furtive, general survey of each other, and both looked as if neither had noticed the act. Yet Major O’Buncous admitted the indiscretion in his first speech.

“ Faith ! we’re both of us older by many years — er — er. You keep your figure, though, I must say ! Well, I’m devilish glad we’ve met ! Are you booked for anywhere to-night ? I won’t be put off by anything less than—an assignation. I’ve nothing of that sort on myself, having—er—only arrived from Malta the day before yesterday.”

“ What ! Why, you don’t mean to say you’re not married yet ! ”

“By me soul, it’s hard to believe! But Fate is preserving me for something special, I am cocksure, or she wouldn’t have led me such a dance among the women only to end in smoke. I beg your pardon, Reilly,” he said, breaking off hurriedly, and addressing a young man with whom he had been walking, and who had dropped a step in the rear. “This, Reilly, is one of me oldest friends, the most highly esteemed man I ever met—perhaps I ever met—a pattern of propriety as a husband, and the father of a numerous family. How *are* the kids—eh, Bathurst?”

Doctor Reilly, a quiet, self-possessed, unimposing young man, came forward and spoke in a delightfully easy manner that transformed him at once into the most agreeable of men. A good-humoured smile was perceptible as he said, with a bow—

“I am honoured by the introduction to the ninety-ninth ‘oldest friend’ of the major.”

“I see that you also must be an old friend,” said the colonel, with an answering smile—“shall we say the ninety-eighth?”

“By me patron saint, I won’t be chaffed before my face! Is Mrs. Bathurst in town? Or, how old’s the youngest—days or weeks? You look like a man off duty.”

“I haven’t had time to get married,” said the colonel, drily. “I believe Fate is also preserving me for a gracious end. But don’t be alarmed, O’Buncous; our prospects shan’t be allowed to clash. Age before honesty, I say.”

“That’s a devilish mean way of letting Reilly know your paltry advantage of a few years! Conscientiously now, Reilly,” said the major, making a strenuous effort to reduce the size of an incipient rotundity of figure, “regarding us both with an unprejudiced eye, and as a medical man (he’s the most conscientious fellow you ever knew), which would you take for the younger?”

“At a casual glance, most certainly your-

self," said Reilly, with all the gravity of one forming an important decision.

"Hi ! I told you he was conscientious."

The colonel acquiesced with much sobriety. "But on closer observation?" he murmured, tentatively.

"I should decide the other way," said Reilly, quickly.

"You have not overrated the amount of conscience possessed by your friend," said the colonel, with a genial laugh. "But, candidly, O'Buncous, you do amaze me. I can't say you look quite as young as you did twelve years ago."

"Oh, come now, that's stiff ! It can't be more than six—or seven—unless—time, like women, deceives us all. Perhaps you're going by the age of your eldest—girl or boy ?"

"Neither," said the colonel, quietly.

"Good heavens ! I never heard of such a thing. Perhaps Reilly, being in the medical profession—" 'pon my soul, Ba-

thurst, I forgot ! But I've got you fixed in my mind somehow as enjoying your lovely place in Surrey, surrounded by what the newspaper fellows call 'a numerous progeny.' Now, will you dine with me, or shall I dine with you—I leave the matter in your own hands?—including Reilly, who's in my charge."

"It isn't far off the festive hour. Suppose you drop in at *my* club; it's near. Doctor Reilly, setting aside our friend's flippant remark, may I have the pleasure of your company?"

These formalities over, they adjourned at once to the *Æsthetic*.

"Ah, I see it's the same as ever! Are you a member of this? Always on the search for novelty. Strike new ideas by the score, and see 'em blow out like—ha'penny matches, or——"

"Woman's smiles," suggested the colonel, with a melancholy air.

O'Buncous sighed, and passed his hand

tenderly over that ever-present, unlucky protuberance at his waist.

“Ah well, I still belong to the Wild Goose ; it does well enough for me. A good—substantial—meal——”

“Ah, you won’t get that at the Æsthetic!” said Bathurst, humorously, cutting short the gusto of his friend’s words. “But we’ll manage to fill you up, I dare say.”

“I can manage it with an ample quantity of—fluid,” said the major, with some seriousness.

They had scarcely entered the Æsthetic before the colonel was greeted by two young men, with whom he was evidently upon the most familiar footing.

“This is something more than luck, Vin,” said he. “Why, I thought you were *en route* for Madras.”

“No. Orders reversed ; or rather, I should say, impending. I wish they would send us to the Cape.”

“What do you say, Neville ?”

“ Well, I don’t care where, since there’s no chance of fighting. I’m for action.”

Vivian Seymour smiled ; his fair aristocratic face was lighted with an expression that gave a full reply to the warmly spoken words of his over-ardent cousin, Neville Hardy.

“ You’re not so anxious, Vin ? ” said the colonel, smiling.

“ I never was in love with a soldier’s life.”

“ It’s the best life in the world, me boy ! ” exclaimed the major, warmly. “ There’s no man who isn’t a soldier that knows the full excitement of life—or love either. Our young friend here has, I see, just the soldier’s eye—just the enthusiastic restless organ that goes to say, ‘ Life or death, love or despair, I’m in for it. Devil knows which, but I’d rather stand for the risk than leave it.’ ”

“ Major O’Buncous was always a born soldier, and he can’t comprehend your coldness. What are you two young fellows doing with yourselves ? Can you join us at dinner ? ”

Nothing could have suited the young fellows better than this proposal. They liked their uncle, and were glad of the opportunity thus afforded.

They were a very jovial party. Neville and Vivian soon began to derive sport from the major. Colonel Bathurst, with what the boys knew was a mere attempt at severity, remanded their levity by an occasional frown.

“Tell us another story, do, major!” said Neville, earnestly. “But did you ever see the widow again?”

“Never, from that moment! But, me boy, as the poet says—well, I can’t at this moment remember what he says; but the force of female beauty is so unutterably indescribable that it makes words appear worse than useless! Description must ever wholly fail to bring home to the mind’s eye those countless charms we dwell upon till—till——”

“They fail to charm,” interpolated Vivian,

quietly, with just the effect of a dash of cold water on the major's fervent heat. He hissed under it like a hot coal.

"You've none of the natural heat of youth, I perceive," said the major, with a boisterous laugh.

"I don't think Vin was wrong in assuming that charms do fail, O'Buncous," said Colonel Bathurst. "*You*, having quite recovered from the effects of no many scores of beauties, must admit they are not eternal."

"By me soul, they are!" in his heat the major very nearly said "sowl." "If I happened to meet one of them now, it would be all the same thing over again. Me heart" (here he placed his hand effusively upon that part of his waistcoat which he supposed approached nearest that organ) —"me heart would glow again——"

"About two inches higher to the right," interrupted Reilly, with much gravity. "You have erroneous ideas of anatomy."

"What the devil odds the exact spot?"

said O'Buncous, spreading his white, fat hand, with its valuable and imposing rings that seemed almost too massive to be comfortable, over the still favourite region of the waistcoat.

"It makes a difference where a bullet's concerned," said Bathurst, drily.

"Me heart would insensibly revive under the soft influence——"

"What is left of it ! Tatters and threads, I should say by this time, O'Buncous."

"Not at all ! Hang it, why, increase of appetite with me grows with what it feeds on ! Reilly will tell you that if you use a muscle, you develop it ; if you don't, it shrivels."

"Darwin goes farther than Reilly," said the colonel, suggestively.

"Oh, you interrupt the major unmercifully," said Vivian, in his slow, calm way, the effect of which was to make that gentleman's eyebrows take an inquiring curve as he turned his full, dark, and rather pro-

truding eyes upon this languid boy with whom he had no sympathy. "As a man of great and varied experience," continued Vivian, seriously, "I was going to ask you how long we might expect the influence of a woman's beauty to last under favourable auspices."

"Favourable auspices are the worst things that could happen. 'Tis when we fear—'tis when we have next to no chance—'tis when we despair, the power is most felt."

"In plain English, in these affairs of the heart, fair weather is not fair weather."

"There's not enough excitement. We—get tired, you know, of all sweets."

"Talking of sweets, I hope you've managed to fill yourself up. Won't you try one of our salads? They're excellent."

"I never could crunch up raw vegetables; I should be like the cow, never get them out of my mouth, if I did."

"But these are cooked."

"Well, I couldn't live on watery greens,

nor even on love itself, in any weather. But you can order a steak ; that'll do for me."

"I thought you were not satisfied," said the colonel ; "but we'll see what we can do. Now, when I came home from India, a trifle used up from the climate, I suffered from a chronic loss of appetite. I could eat literally nothing but artistic food ; indeed, I had a distaste for everything in life."

"Ah, heart !" interpolated O'Buncous, sympathetically.

"No, liver," replied Bathurst, prosaically. "Righted itself, however, and found its action with the fresh air of the Surrey hills, but left me still with the taste for delicate dishes. In fact, I had acquired a habit that was difficult to break. When I went down to the old place, meaning to set up my tent there, and so on, I found I must have starved upon the good old English fare, always so plentifully spread before me. I was actually obliged to return to town in order to dine here. However, I made

arrangements with a first-class cook, and made fundamental alterations in the domestic arrangements at Netherby. The boys here will tell you it's quite possible to live there now under any conditions. Perhaps you'd like to try? Happy thought! What are you all going to do just now? what's to be your autumn manoeuvre?"

"Faith! I don't know."

"Nor I."

"Nor I," echoed Reilly.

"Ha, ha! a batch of idle bachelors awaiting her Majesty's pleasure," laughed the colonel.

O'Buncous sighed. "I haven't the luck of your nephews; we stand very little chance of foreign service. Honestly, I shall be delighted to see that fine old place of yours once more."

"Yes; I remember you met my sister Clare—that's a memory. Her eldest son this"—touching Vivian affectionately on the shoulder.

“Indeed, indeed?” exclaimed O’Buncous, uneasily. “Fine woman! splendid woman when I met her! Bless me, her son! She must have married amazingly young.”

“She must have been four or five and twenty at the time,” said the colonel, with some amusement. “Well, never mind, you’ll come, and—you young fellows, now, couldn’t you quite as well await orders there as here? It’s been rather dull at the old place lately. Say you will, and then, perhaps, we shan’t have so much difficulty in getting Doctor Reilly here to join us, unless he is booked for a better occupation. Come, now, I must have your decision sharp, boys, or you’ll very impolitely keep the doctor waiting with his reply.”

“Nothing could possibly suit us better,” said Vivian. “I’m safe in answering for Neville. He won’t find the weeks dreary now, if he should have to wait through a few of them.”

With a full appreciation of the colonel’s

cordiality, and a little pressure from all sides, Reilly admitted that he found the idea most gratifying; and so it was readily settled, that they all should go to Netherby in the course of a few days.

Strolling away from the club in the cool night air, the major, puffing his cigar with extreme self-complacency, said, "So that's her son? Doesn't it make you feel somewhat behind your time? or have you given up the prospect for yourself, and going to make that cool young stripling ahead there your heir? He's like her; but how impossible it all seems! I was very much struck with her, I remember; didn't like to admit it before her boy, you know."

"No, no," agreed the colonel. "But I'd quite forgotten that part of the business. But, O'Buncous, it's quite amazing to me, with your very susceptible temperament, that you've not been caught in Hymen's noose before this. You are the very man of all one could swear would have married."

“Married? Gad! I’ve been as near to it—it’s been a close shave with me dozens of times. I don’t think I could recollect now or disassociate but a few cases——”

“Well, O’Buncous, one will do,” interrupted his friend.

“Well, in one instance that strikes me, the lady, a widow, was really one of the most marvellous creatures you ever saw—a perfect paragon of wit and beauty; in short, you know a man’s opinion of the woman at whose feet he may be said to be prostrate. Well, the matter was all arranged; but she, having scruples about offending some members of her family, determined on a quiet wedding—in fact, on a sly one. Not being overburdened with means at the time—candidly, as you may know, I never have been—I thought of doing the thing from prudential motives, and, having agreed upon the church where the ceremony should be performed, took a room at an hotel in the neighbourhood, and

quietly awaited the event. As luck would have it, that hotel stood in not less than three parishes, and the beastly annoyance was that I'd told her that I had a special licence. Now, who was to expect a hitch of this kind? Of course, it came out at the very worst moment, and the humbugging thing couldn't be settled. The widow was—perhaps you will think justly—enraged; but she needn't have given me such a taste of her temper beforehand, especially in the presence of witnesses." Here the major paused, and waved his hand as if dismissing the whole unpleasant coil of circumstances. "But there, Bathurst, it was all compensated for when I saw her ten years afterwards. I *never* was more delighted."

"Exactly. In spite of time and space the flame burst forth with the same purity——"

"No. By George! I was delighted at my providential escape. Bathurst, she was withered!" he went on, solemnly. "I felt that if she had belonged to me I should

have abandoned her at any risk, though she was a woman of some fortune. But you know that sort of thing had no attraction for me, or I might have sacrificed myself over and over again for the sake of filthy lucre. Why, when I was in Malta the celebrated Countess Zephyr tried all her arts to catch me; and though she was really, as you know, a celebrity on account of her beauty, she didn't, somehow, suit my fancy. In plain truth, I like to—lead the way with a woman; I don't like to receive the smallest advance on her part; it destroys all the refreshing modesty that is so essential in a woman."

"Vivian has been edified by your last remarks. I can see by the expression upon his cynical mouth that he is amused."

Major O'Buncous turned sharply round, and faced the two young men who had strolled after them.

"He's welcome to my experience, and it has been a wide one. It's astonishing the

mistakes young men make !—bound to make ; because, you see, of course, experience is a thing that must be bought.”

“ I was under the impression,” said Neville, who was quite ready to banter with the major—“ I was under the impression that these affairs of the heart were so much a matter of nature that our first efforts in that direction were generally the only genuine ones that mankind ever experience.”

“ The most erroneous belief that was ever generally accepted. Never believe it, me boy ; you’ll improve in it as you go on, till you are a master of the art of love and of the hearts of women.”

“ Now you are modestly showing up your own perfection, major,” said Bathurst, drily. “ You want us to know the state of consummate excellence you have yourself reached.”

CHAPTER II.

THE COLONEL'S VIEWS.

LATE one evening of that week, Colonel Bathurst and his four guests arrived at Netherby, so it was not until after breakfast on the following day that they found themselves admiring the beautiful gardens and surrounding park-like grounds that made the special attraction of the place.

"I am always more at home here than I am at home," said Vivian, smiling.

"And I always feel the place more home-like when you are here," said his uncle, heartily. "And, Vin, remember the Glade is yours now; so when you want it I can only say that 'possession can be had' at any moment."

“Thank you, uncle,” said the young man, gravely ; “but in all probability many years must elapse before I take up my residence there.”

“Perhaps you’ll disdain it when the time comes.”

“I shall have to acquire a strange taste. Who are the new tenants ?”

“I don’t know much about them. Singular people rather, I believe ; but that won’t affect me. I had a fence put up some time ago, where the grounds adjoin, when I first thought of letting the place. It’s altogether too pretty to be uninhabited.”

“I was in hope of agreeable neighbours.”

“Then your hope is frustrated. My steward managed the affair. He tells me it is a kind of nunnery for ancient maids who despise the world.”

“Nuns !” exclaimed O’Buncous, coming up ; “d’ye keep ’em about the premises, as you do other novelties ? I’ll be candid with you, Bathurst ; I’m a sworn friend to nuns

—always relieve them of their vows if the matter is left to me.”—Turning to Neville at his side, and being sure of an interested listener, he went on, “Do you know, I once had the supreme pleasure of rescuing the loveliest young female—probably in the world, certainly in Europe.”

“Now, really,” said Vivian, in his soft, languid tone, “you’re *not* going to tell us that the lady in this case failed to reward you?”

But the major was too obtuse to catch the delicacy of the satire. “I don’t suppose I should have failed,” he said, with ostentatious modesty, “if the lady had not been preoccupied. She had a lover, and—by Jove, the nearest squeak I ever had in my life—he, taking me for a rival, and I taking him for a pursuer, we engaged before there was time to explain the mistake. Fortunately she had courage to interfere before I killed the man.”

“As you were, of course, bound to do,” interpolated Vivian, coolly.

“Nothing stands in my way when my blood’s up; I should undoubtedly have killed him. But instead, I had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing her wrapped in his arms under my very eyes.”

“Pleasure? Why, I thought you were in love with her?” murmured Neville, in some disappointment at the end of the tragedy.

Vivian and the colonel had moved away in advance.

“Do you know, uncle, I think that rather a strong dose if the major would be apt to nauseate.”

“Tush! Youth is always intolerant of bombast. Now, the major’s not a bad fellow—and I’ve many associations to prove that—but he is rather too pretentious, extremely good-natured, though, and capital fun for those who can see it, because he never cuts up rough, and doesn’t mean one-half, one-twentieth part of what he says.”

“It isn’t true, then, that he ever was irresistible, as he seems to think?”

The colonel laughed quite enjoyably. "He? I don't believe there ever has been a real event of that kind in his lifetime. In the days when we were thrown together, I know that women mostly laughed at him. Do you know, Vin, it's rather a curious thing that some people always do manage to make a theme out of the—deficiencies of their lives."

"If that be the case," said Vivian, with a significant glance at his uncle, "you have not been deficient in experiences he boasts of; for I never heard you, nor others, mention one."

"Don't be impertinent, young man," said the colonel, good-humouredly.

"Yes, but, uncle," Vivian continued, hesitatingly, "has there — ever been — a lady——"

"My dear boy, how vague you are. I should think that at the present moment there may be a few—millions scattered about the world."

"No ; but you couldn't misunderstand. Now, *my* people all say you'll marry," continued Vivian, with that cool, emphatic air which says significantly, "but *I* don't."

"Ah, indeed ? That's very likely ; most people do marry, you see."

"I suppose they're in the right, as they are in the majority," said Vivian, suggestively.

"They have perhaps as much right to be in the wrong," was the curt reply.

"Well, according to some views, the minority is generally right. If you regard it in one light, the highest class of mind must always be in the minority, though of course it doesn't always follow that the minority should always be composed of the highest class of minds."

"I am inclined to think that in the questions which affect the highest subjects the opinion of the minority usually is to be preferred. You see, the commonplace, conventional mode of viewing social matters is

produced entirely from mere habit and observation of that which is common, and therefore palpable. But to the least original mind there are always grave doubts as to the propriety of these manners and customs."

"Yes," interrupted Vivian; "and out of the many who do so doubt, I verily believe you are the only man I have ever known who ventures to act not strictly in accordance with accepted conventionalities. I don't suppose, now, *you* have any idea of the full amount of gossip among the ladies, and chaff among the men, that took place after you had made your stand—an original one, it must be granted—against men-servants. Yet, now the wonder is over, and every one can see how well your system acts, you would be astonished to hear how many have expressed a thorough conviction that it was undoubtedly more pleasant and more consistent with the demands of society to be waited upon by a neat, smart hand-maiden in one's house than to have a burly

anomaly in the shape of a man at the back of one's chair, and half a dozen of the same nonentities ranged about the room, more for the sake of displaying their awkwardly stuffed proportions than for any other reasonable purpose."

"You see, Vin, there were times in which a ponderous butler might have been a necessity; but now our dishes are not so ponderous as the man himself. Rely upon it, the time will come when he will be a relic of the past."

"What a thorough reformer you are!"

"I hope I am. It would be a long time before we arrive at that state of perfection where there is nothing to reform."

They strolled on, chatting, Vivian making an occasional remark as to the increasing beauty of the grounds.

"You must have, I think, a passion for trees. I notice you retain even their last bare limbs."

"Yes, and clothe them with ivy. I think

I have the kind of tenderness for them one has for human things. That old fellow, now, will look splendid when his new clothing has quite enveloped his naked form. There's something so full of meaning, to my mind, in a tree. Of whatever kind it may be, an association is sure to arise. Could any one help, for instance, comparing the exquisite gracefulness, the delicate fibre, the tender movement of that silver birch, with a slender modest girl who scarcely knows anything of her own beauty, but who stands quite distinct from other forms in the fairy grace that belongs to her? Look round you, Vin, and tell me if every tree is not a type of humanity. There you stand, young and bold, scarcely spreading any distance yet, but giving noble promise. Not that I suppose I shall live to see that beech in its prime, but I have time to see you there."

"Neville thinks that a man's youth must be his prime. He can't understand that a

man never can reach the appreciation of things in his first youth. Why, I—even I—am old enough to know what progress in that particular means.”

“And, Vin, there are crude ideas to be extinguished at all periods of life. Now, do turn and look at O'Buncous laying down the law, impetuously one moment, whispering confidentially the next, then slapping his leg and exploding with a genuine roar of laughter, and all about nothing, one may venture to swear. I've known that man more than twenty years, and I don't believe he's altered, mentally, since he was fourteen. There was a time I hung on every word he uttered, believing, with a boy's ingenuous mind, in all his exaggerated bounce. He was always the hero of his own stories, I remember, and I thought them all so good. He's really a curious specimen of his race—no depth of character, no depth of feeling, and possesses still so many attributes of the boy. And this I imagine to be the cause

of his aversion to growing age. Regard them still, Vin. One would think the major was laying the scheme for at least a gunpowder plot. Observe the emphatic action, the earnest persuasion, the laughing devil in his bold black eyes. Yet he is more a child than any one I know."

* * * * *

"So you really are game for a spree?"

"Well," hesitatingly, "yes—unless it's played off on my uncle."

"What! white feather?"

Neville laughed. "No; but he's too good a fellow to play pranks upon—at least, as far as I'm concerned. It's different on your part, major."

"It's nothing to do with him, but he mustn't know of it. He never would take a practical joke. Do *you* know anything about the place they call the Nunnery?"

"Have you a fancy to storm the citadel? There's a high wall about the grounds that defies inquisition. Only by rowing in a

certain curve of the river can you get a glimpse of them."

"I couldn't live so near and have my curiosity baffled, and it's been raised already. Just tell me, now, what do you know?"

"Well, I don't know how I've heard it, but I've been told the house was taken about a year ago by ladies who wanted complete seclusion from the world."

"A year ago? Then all the village must know more than we do!"

Neville laughed at the excited exclamation. "They're welcome to the knowledge. What are we to do with these ladies?"

"One would like to look at them. The very fact of their seclusion has something stimulating in it. I've lost no time. I took the opportunity of pumping one of the gardeners just now, and from what I can hear there's quite a romance concerning the place. They are all ladies, with the exception of one old fellow, who does the gardening. And though the information from this

quarter hasn't been much, it's quite sufficient to prove to me that an adventure would be just the thing to bring about the most delightful acquaintance in the world."

"Of course, they're lovely women," said Neville, slyly.

"Of course they are," said the major, with solemn warmth, "or *I* should not be so interested. Is your cool card of a cousin, now, the man for the enterprise?"

Neville shook his head. "Not he. But he's game, you know. What is it you intend doing?"

"Well, let's determine to make a bold venture—invent some scheme that shall land us at their door, and find out the whole secret before any one's aware what we're up to. Why, I'm told they even go to church in Derby veils, and that a visitor never enters the doors."

"They're not beauties, major, depend on it. They are a community of pig-faced ladies. Who ever heard of a woman designedly veiling her beauty?"

"Except as a stratagem!" exclaimed the major, excitedly. "Women are the very deuce for intrigue. You'll see now, for my first impressions of a case are never wrong. You abide by my instructions—pump everybody you come across—and meanwhile I'll perfect the scheme. What say you to breaking your leg outside the gate? Assistance becomes a matter of Christian charity."

"It's stale—been done no end of times on the stage."

"But they wouldn't know that," suggested the major.

"Couldn't we think of something more original? And besides, who's to break his leg?"

"Well, I should propose you," said the major, reflectively; "I think you'd act the part best."

"I should propose Reilly. He must have seen so much of that kind of thing that he'd know exactly how to put it on."

"Too many scruples; too old, me boy."

Bless you, Reilly's years older than I—in the spirit. Why, I'd do it myself, if I wasn't quite so heavy; I'd do it now for two straws, though the risk's far greater in my case."

"Why, you don't seriously mean——"

"Certainly not to do the thing in reality," laughed the major. "Some slight injury must be inflicted beforehand. But what should a soldier care about that? One isn't allowed to speak to these girls of Bathurst's, is one? By St. Patrick, how pretty they are—those I've seen! How many of 'em has he got?"

"You can't easily count," said Neville, "because, you see, they all wear uniform."

"Do they wait at dinner? Dash it! I shall be afraid to ask for bread. Do they draw the corks? I shall make a devil of a mess of it, I know I shall!"

"It's quite a novel style, more like the *diner à la russe* as far as the table is laid. Everything is pretty, you know—flowers, and all that; and you never know where

your plate comes from. The girls used all to dress in black and white last time I was here; they looked like a flock of magpies, only a great deal nicer."

"But there's no speaking?"

"Except on business. My uncle's deucedly particular. By-the-by, I may as well give you a hint, major—*do* be careful with your stories; at least, you know, until the dessert comes on."

The major's face was a study.

"I shall make a mess of it," he said, so seriously that he nearly upset Neville's gravity. "I say, give me a hint in time, if you find me going the pace. Talk, you know, is like, you know, like—like—well, I don't quite know what; but something you can't control."

"There are a good many things of that sort, major, though you can't quite find a simile."

"Are there no men in the house, then?"

"None. The gardeners live at the lodge,

and the housekeeper, who manages everything, and is, I am given to understand, a remarkably clever woman, has never once found the assistance of a man necessary."

"I should like to see *her*!" exclaimed the major, with emphasis.

"You'd better ask my uncle to introduce you."

"Ah, he's a sly dog! But I'll find him out; I'll be even with him. What is *she* like, now?"

"Well, she's quite sixty."

O'Buncous put up his hands in horror. "I'll hear no more," he exclaimed; "my friend must be a fool." And at this point they broke off.

Later in the day Neville made discoveries that tended to raise his expectations, and excite him on the major's scheme. He gathered that the Glade was inhabited by several ladies, two old servants, and a decrepit gardener, so taciturn that scarcely a word could be extracted from him, and who

rarely came into the village. This news Neville communicated to the major.

"But 'tis the maids," he exclaimed; "they wouldn't hold their tongues for the devil himself."

"They are elderly women, and they are evidently chosen for the especial purpose of holding their tongues."

"It's the most amazing thing I ever heard of in my life! Fancy being able to live in a place like this for twelve months without being found out! How about the parson? Bathurst's is intimate with him, of course. By-the-bye, does he go to church?"

"Who—my uncle? Sometimes. But I think it's merely to show up, because the vicar's a muff, and he'll last here till the end of time."

"We'll go to church to-morrow, Hardy. They will be there!"

"Yes; but I'm told they sit somewhere up by the organ loft, where it's so dark you can't see anything."

“That organ loft will see *me*, anyhow.”

“Major, be careful! My uncle is strict to the last degree. He has views——”

“So have I—h’m—broad ones. What are his?”

“Not exactly what is called ‘broad;’ I should say ‘wide.’”

“I’ll be shot if I can see the difference!” exclaimed O’Buncous, as they parted to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER III.

TABLE TALK.

COLONEL BATHURST'S dining-room was quite unlike an ordinary English dining-room ; it gave the impression of cheerful, spacious airiness which is seldom to be found. It was besides light in its adornments, and, with the graceful display of flowers, it appeared far more like a drawing-room when the men entered, and the maids stood decorously around, dressed in delightfully refreshing cool colours that gratified the eye, as Vivian had truly said, far more than scarlet and calves.

The major felt bashful ; he trod as if on air, and nearly stumbled in his efforts to appear so light. He hoped fervently he

would be well supplied with the substance necessary, that he might not have to address either of those dainty damsels who were now flitting about so noiselessly and with such delicate expedition. As if by magic, he found himself supplied by quick slim hands that never seemed to be in the way one moment. He really had the audacity to look straight at his attendant at last, but her eyes were not directed towards him, and she seemed not to be aware of his notice.

He fell into no difficulties, however, for the talk was well sustained, and his unusual quietness passed without comment. Once, indeed, he trod on dangerous ground ; for while Reilly was explaining some occurrence at their late station, Malta, the major broke out suddenly with—

“ Ah, that was when I cut him out with the charming countess ! The most comical affair you ever heard—— ”

Here he was interrupted by a significant cough from Neville, who sat opposite ; after

which he quite subsided, and made no more than a feeble response occasionally. But he was himself once more directly the door closed upon the bevy of nymphs that had discomposed him.

“What the devil do you mean, Bathurst, by putting a man in such an awkward position? I’ve been in purgatory for the last half-hour.”

“I’m appropriately sorry, major; but we’ll get on better to-morrow. You shall order your dinner for yourself. Mrs. Grove can send you whatever you want.”

“Hang it! I don’t mean the dinner. I’ve never been placed so before. At a dinner, you know, with no ladies, a man feels free, and I don’t mind admitting that I should have got on first rate if I’d been able to talk to them. Don’t you ever speak to them yourself? What’s their names? and what do you dress ’em all alike for? But, by the Lord, Bathurst, you show your taste; they’re fine figures, the whole lot of ’em.”

The young men were laughing outright ; the colonel suppressed a smile.

“ I never saw my friend O'Buncous abashed before,” said Reilly.

“ Why couldn't you have imagined there were ladies present, and regulated your talk accordingly ? ” asked Neville.

“ No,” retorted the major, stoutly ; “ of course I couldn't. When there are ladies present, I always talk to *them*. I never waste my words on a man. Look here, Bathurst, get a few ladies to dinner with us for the future, just to put me at my ease. Ask Mrs. Whatever-you-call-her to take the head of the table, and have a few of the girls in, or I shall take my meals in my own room.”

Here again they laughed.

“ Uncle, are there any ladies in your neighbourhood just now ? ”

“ Lady Crump and her companion. I don't suppose you would care for them. Mrs. Darlington and her daughter are at

Spa. I really think the vicar's wife is the only available lady just at present."

"You haven't any acquaintance with those at the Glade, then?" said Neville, experimentally.

"No. I should imagine they are people of a different sphere. Of course, I merely judge from their eccentric seclusion. Lady Crump, whose curiosity was aroused, couldn't gain admittance."

"Has nobody seen them?" asked Vivian.

"I suppose somebody has." The colonel smiled as though he saw a joke. "I'm afraid you won't any of you gratify your curiosity. If I had a wife or sister here now, I would put her on her mettle, and we would soon find out what stuff they're made of."

"Hasn't your factotum, Mrs. What's-her-name, told you anything in detail, as women do?" asked O'Buncous.

"I don't gossip with Mrs. Grove about my neighbours; but I'll tell you what I'll

do, I'll give you a chance of questioning the old lady yourself, as she's the only female society I can offer you. She's generally in the conservatory getting the flowers when I go round in the morning."

"Is she a dragon?"

"I don't find her so myself. She's a capital manager."

"Well, I'll make the attempt, for I shall get nothing out of you, I see. You were always a singular man. What's your real hobby now? You always had one, I remember."

"The acknowledgment of woman as a rational creature," replied Bathurst, humorously.

"But aren't you satisfied with her as she is? I don't see what you want of her 'rational.'"

Reilly laughed. "You are of the old school, major; the colonel is evidently of the newest. Are you for wholesale reform?" he asked of the host.

"My uncle goes to a greater length than any man I ever knew," struck in Neville.

"Let your uncle answer for himself, young man," was the smiling reply. "Well, Doctor Reilly, I think I go as far on the question as any man, ancient or modern. I've no doubt the principle we are acting upon is altogether an unfair one. Do you go with me?"

"So far, most certainly. But," he went on hesitatingly, "to tell you the truth, I think that woman herself needs reform in many ways before we can effect any sort of alteration in the principles that now affect our action."

Vivian Seymour opened his calm blue eyes with a sudden vivid interest. "There I am with you," he said, in his slow, even tones. His voice, though not often heard, was always listened to when it was heard. There was a peculiar gentleness in both voice and speaker, mixed with a

strange effect of power. "I go fully with my uncle up to one clause; I stop at another. Brain should always govern force; and if we want to give women power, we must begin by making them fit to wield it."

"But my argument is, not that they should be all fit for the government I would accord them, but that they are, as they stand, at least as well fitted to form an opinion as so many of the opposite sex who already hold the right."

"Here," said Vivian—"here I always see the fact that the men have already received the gift of ruling, and we do not see the incompatibility quite so clearly. It is one thing to take a step, and another to retrieve one. It is not because I see woman beneath what she should be that I think her incapable of being what she pleases."

"Bravo, Vin!" murmured the colonel.

Vivian held up his hand deprecatingly. "But she is not that yet. She will have to reform—in the first place, in her dress

—before she can prove herself a rational creature.”

Reilly warmly acquiesced. “That is an essential particular you have noted; and it’s uncommonly shrewd for a man of your years. Now, I have necessarily been bound to know where the abominable ever-arising question of fashion injures the health and distorts the beauty of a woman. I am far from being uncharitable to the sex, and I do not attribute their slavish conformity to fashion so much to vanity as I do to feminine modesty that abhors to be conspicuous.”

“Oh, dash it!” exploded the major, almost angrily, “you’re all wrong there! Women dress to be looked at; they don’t do it for the sake of modesty. I never heard such an idea! Reilly, you’ve never talked like this to *me*.”

“He thought you wouldn’t understand him, major,” cut in Neville.

“I made a deduction upon certain grounds,

and fancied you did not hold woman quite at my estimation ; so I held my peace," said Reilly, plausibly.

"Never let it be said, for my gallantry's sake, that I have ever thrown a stone at the roughest of the softer sex. As Bathurst says, woman is the—the active principle of life."

"Excuse me," interrupted the colonel.

"And excuse *me*," laughed Reilly. "She is the mainspring of life, think what we will."

"She is the poetry of life," said Vivian, dulcetly.

"She's the prime motive of life," said Neville, sturdily.

"Do you mean primary?" asked his uncle.

Neville coloured. "I can't start off my opinions as you and Vin do, but I've got my ideas all the same."

"But, you know," expostulated the major, "we must, after all, regard the woman as an inferior animal."

“Do you mean as an animal pure and simple?” asked Reilly, jocosely. “Is it a matter of physical strength alone to which you allude? We can prove over and over again the sound courage, endurance, and perception of woman when she is, as is rarely the case, brought to the test of those dangers with which man is familiar.”

“Think back,” said Bathurst, with a genial smile; “think on what brave and noble women have done, in acts alone where they may bear comparison with men. Do you remember those ladies who brought home the ship the other day, who had worked days and nights with an energy and perseverance that would have done credit to any man, while the Lascars lay helpless from fear, and only one sailor was left to guide them through their way? Bring them to the fore, I say. There will be a little difficulty before they find their proper level; and then woman will take her stand, be estimated at her real value, and be what

she was intended to be, and what she is happily enough sometimes—man's ordained helpmate and equal ; neither his toy nor his victim."

"*You* seem to have given a fair amount of consideration to the fair sex," remarked the doctor.

"We all do in our various ways," said Vivian, suggestively.

"Certainly, the proper study of mankind is—woman," said O'Buncous, with much gravity. "And what Shakespeare says can't be wrong."

"But Shakespeare never said that, major," said Neville ; "nor any other man, that I'm aware."

"We can't expect to know every quotation that ever was made," said the major, hastily. "If it wasn't Shakespeare, it must have been Moore. At any rate, I had a friend who was very proud of the quotation."

Vivian and Reilly exchanged glances.

"The major recognizes only Moore and Shakespeare," remarked Reilly; "but Moore generally comes first."

"Why, there never was finer poetry written," cried O'Buncous, enthusiastically. "Look at the depth of it, and the—the exquisite language—such as any one can understand. That's the sort of thing you don't get every day; that's the sort of thing none of your modern poets can write."

"I'm really afraid your favourite would not even be accounted a poet had he lived in these unenlightened, modern days," said Vivian, quietly.

"Of course he wouldn't," echoed the major, warmly. "In these days people want to be considered so devilish clever that they'll only pretend to understand what other people can't."

Again Vivian and Reilly exchanged glances.

"Ancient or modern?" asked Vivian, sententiously.

“Both.”

“I am an admirer of the philosophic school,” replied the colonel. “I see nothing to admire in your mere musical writers. I want something besides music in my poetry. It is one of my fancies to judge men according to their tastes in matters of art. Come now, Doctor Reilly, give me a parallel between Shelley and Byron. I can apply my test admirably, being quite in the dark as to your tastes.”

O'Buncous helped himself to another glass; he was clearly cut out of this discussion.

“I can't draw any sort of parallel,” said Reilly, with a smile, “except that both understood the musical magic of words. However, I won't sneak out of the test; I'll tell you honestly, so far as a mere ordinary reader may be worth hearing, that I believe Shelley, in spite of his high reputation, to be a much-overrated man, and I believe Byron to be, perhaps, the most

generally misunderstood poet who has ever existed."

"It always takes a keen critic to estimate satire correctly," said Vivian, slowly.

"Doctor Reilly, I don't understand you," exclaimed Neville. "Surely there's no obscurity in Byron? I don't profess for one minute to read what Vivian can, but I flatter myself that I understand Byron; and, what's more, I enjoy his poetry more than any other, though I've got a sort of impression that it's wrong to say so."

"That's just the position," said Reilly, with a smile.

"I have formed my estimate, doctor, and I'm very much obliged to you," said the colonel. "My nephew here is just beginning to use his brains. I used to tell him, long before he would believe me, that he would learn to appreciate and criticise very differently when he arrived within the first boundaries of manhood."

"Ah, that was when I had read the

‘Vision of Judgment’ seriously, and thought it profane. You agree, then, with my uncle, that we must pass through phases of thought?”

“Certainly, if we can think at all. I believe, in a great measure, our tendencies are shown very easily; so far as that, in some cases, they foreshadow from childhood the ultimate man. But we cannot arrive at rational conclusions at a bound; we must come through certain conditions of thought before we can reach others.”

“Then the notion that thinking

‘Is but an idle waste of thought,
For naught is everything, and everything is naught,’
is nonsense?”

“No. For a man may arrive at nothing by various roads.”

“There, too, was a man who, with all his gifts, was, as Colonel Bathurst expresses it, deficient in the real weight of thought that goes to make poetry of the highest kind.”

O'Buncous was getting quite impatient. His face was many degrees more vivid than it was when he commenced the repast.

"Bathurst, you're driving me into bad habits. A man must do something, you know; if he can't talk, he must drink. It's all very well for Reilly, as a medical man, but——"

Here the young men laughed.

"O'Buncous," exclaimed the colonel, gravely, "I'm afraid your only books were women's looks and——"

"Spare the rest of the quotation," entreated Vivian.

"How tender you are upon anything that impugns the honour of the gentler sex!" said Reilly, smiling.

"You know the end?" said Vivian.

"Ah, and I know it too!" said the major. "If he'd been worth calling a poet who said it——"

"It was no less than your own particular star, Tom Moore," said Reilly, suavely.

O'Buncous reflected. "I've got a deuced bad memory," he said, "though, as I've remarked before, a man can't expect to know everything that was ever written. A word of advice to you young men. Give me a man of the world against a bookworm any day. Your bookworm only gets at the husk of things, and misses the kernel. You've been talking a deuce of a lot about thinking; and what the deuce is the good of it, I should like to know? It don't lead to anything. Why, one fine action is worth a thousand thoughts. Bless you! I've had 'em myself in my time, and I know all about it. When my glorious countryman Wellington won the battle of Waterloo—and I hope that's worth talking about, as an historical event—why—why, it was all action. Why, it's actually called 'an action.'"

When the major arrived at this brilliant climax, he paused, quite overcome by his own convictions.

“The end of all thought should be action,” said Vivian, in his distinct mellow tones.

“And why not the beginning, I want to know?” was the audacious retort, of which inconsistency O’Buncous, to do him justice, was not sensible.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GLADE.

OAK GLADE, on this delicious September morning, was looking as beautiful as the Garden of Eden might have looked in the days of Eve. It was the most charming combination of fine old trees, well-kept lawns, and as lavish a display of common garden flowers as might anywhere be found in England.

A girl, "gowned in pure white," sat under the shadow of an oak, sketching. Her long fair hair, all unloosed, veiled her figure and half hid the classical lines of her pure pale face. A pair of very serious grey eyes were raised frequently from her work to her model—a handsome woman who was strolling

with gracefully bent head while she studied the pages of the book she held, earnestly absorbed.

Upon a rustic seat sat a lady of middle age, knitting. She was still beautiful, still graceful in spite of time, although the lines of care and sorrow were so indelibly written on her thoughtful face. At her feet, stretched in idle abandonment on the grass, lay an exquisitely beautiful girl. She was quite young—not a child, yet with something of the attributes of childhood lingering in her womanhood.

“I don’t feel as though I should ever care to leave this lovely spot,” said the elder lady. “I have felt at home ever since we came here. Ah, Kate, young people are apt to think every change delightful. Tell me, child, what can be happier, more peaceful than our lives here in this secluded haven? I had no hope when we left Derbyshire of finding any place that could seem like home. Why, it is scarcely twelve

months since we made that change, and I was in hope we might remain content for many years to come."

"Yes, mamma. But 'contentment' is a very unsatisfactory word. I cannot say I am not content; but indeed I feel sometimes, in my very impatience of restriction, as if I would rather be free, even at the risk of finding discontent."

"My dear," said the mother, with a sigh, "can't you believe in my word? Have I not told you of the hollowness of life, except for duty's sake—and is not our duty clear?"

"But it would be interesting, if not pleasant, to find out the vacuum for one's self," said Kate, a trifle impetuously.

"You will not feel so after a little while," said her mother, soothingly. "Look at Adelaide—her occupations, her interests, are now so complete that she never experiences the least weariness. And it is the same with Mary—her studies absorb her whole time; and any one may see that they are perfectly

happy. No, my dear, what you want is to attach yourself strongly to some object of interest, out of which a powerful motive will soon arise, and satisfy every demand of your mind."

"I wish there was some other study than those I know of," said Kate, reflectively. "I don't care for shells—much ; although I did think if we got somewhere down among them, you know, by the sea, I might acquire a taste. You said that Adelaide didn't care for cooking when she began, and now with all her reading and experience it has become quite a science."

"That is what I say," said her mother eagerly. "A mere dip into a subject will not convince you whether you like it or not. It is necessary to acquire some knowledge before you feel a vivid interest."

"Well, that's what I was thinking about the shells——"

"All seaside towns are crowded at this time of the year."

“But the people wouldn’t eat us. Surely we need not associate with them because we must see them. How I wish we were more like other girls!”

Again Mrs. Elmore sighed; and, as she lifted her eyes to her daughter’s face, there were tears to be seen there.

“Oh, mamma darling! I quite forgot—I know you can’t bear us to say anything like that! and I know how good and kind you are—how you give every thought for our comfort.”

The beautiful girl kissed her mother warmly, and nestled her hand in hers as she went on tenderly, “But I don’t mean to be ungrateful when I say that I don’t think it’s wise to talk about it, but we do all feel as though we would rather be like other people, and not live all our days under a ban. You wish it yourself, don’t you, mamma?”

“God knows I do, Katie! But in obeying my conscience I do what is best for you, my girls. It is true you will have to

miss some of the more exciting pleasures of life, but, on the other hand, you will enjoy an almost absolute immunity from the trials that beset all people who live in the world."

"It is true we might almost as well—be—be—" "mummies" she was going to say, but checked herself in time, and substituted "out of it."

"Give up all thoughts of Brighton. I don't know much about the coast there, but I do not think it is rich in shells. And, darling, since this neighbourhood is so very retired, and I can trust your discretion so thoroughly, you shall have the pony you were so anxious about a little while since. Now, no thanks," said the mother, a tender delight stealing over her face the while. "You are of a different temperament from your sisters—so like me when I was a girl—that I think you want more active, more energetic occupation than you can have within these walls."

“They are high walls,” sighed Kate.
“We can never even see any one pass.”

“Now, really, dear ! there cannot be any advantage in seeing a few commonplace people stalk by one’s house, mostly ill-dressed too, you will admit.”

“Yes ; but then there is something amusing even in that.”

“It seems a pity to ridicule people for their want of knowledge or taste,” said Mrs. Elmore, gently.

“Will you think me very foolish, mamma, if I admit that I have sometimes thought I should like, just for once, to be dressed like that fashionable lady we saw at the station when we arrived here ?”

“Surely you don’t think she looked either graceful or sensible, that you should wish to emulate her ?”

“No, no,” laughed Kate, gleefully. “It was only that I should like to see how I should look. We dress like nuns, but then—of course, we are nuns.”

“No, my child. You have taken no such senseless view of life. You are secluded from necessity’s sake, and not from choice.”

“Well—well, it’s all the same.”

Again the light faded out of the mother’s face, as the half-impatient words escaped the girl’s lips. She regarded the fair form, and exquisite absent face with a sadness that had plainly much of pain. And yet most mothers would have looked at such a girl with joy and pride; for Kate was, according to the most rigid laws of beauty, a really magnificent specimen of womanhood. A curved supple figure of medium height, a head of pure classical lines, poised with a dainty pride upon a throat and shoulders that were really alone charm enough for any one woman to possess. And then a creamy skin, and such tints of colour, rather bright than soft, that from their contrast form a delicious whole. Dark brown skin carried off the pure

heaven of her forehead in a sweep there is no describing, and eyes like the colour of the blue in the sky, on a dark night when the stars are out. What the mother's thoughts were as she gazed upon this enchanting creature it would be strange to tell; but when she spoke again her voice was low and tremulous.

“I'm not sure, Kate, that you would take to the shells. I really think your forte is music, and it is a never-failing source of delight. I have noticed that you are always happy when you're singing——”

Here she was interrupted by the lightest and most musical of laughs.

“Or miserable, mamma. I always fall into the spirit of the song, whatever it be. And songs, I think, are mostly sad. Yes; but you are right; I do enjoy my music, although even there is still a want—an end, or aim in my life, if you like. You see, Adelaide has her hope for the future; she is training herself for work in which

she surely has the strongest interest. Mary, again, pursuing subjects one may almost call scientific, finds satisfaction enough in her pursuits and occupation also. 'Tis I alone who am so unstable."

"Wait a little ; your choice will come. It was only last week the vicar congratulated me upon the beauty of your voice, and mentioned the great advantage he felt you to be to the church music. Of course, publicity is denied to any of you, although in Adelaide's peculiar instance, and considering the class in which she would work, she might really at her age be already in the field of her labour."

Here the mother's eyes fixed themselves upon the tall, slowly-moving figure, with head inclined over the book.

"But she is really far too handsome—yet——"

"Is it really rare, then, for a woman to be so handsome as Adelaide ?" asked Kate.

The mother paused, then went on rapidly,

“There can be no harm in my telling you that you are all exceptionally beautiful, and in this consists my greatest difficulty. Dear me, child, there are families of girls by the hundred in which no one need have such apprehensions as those I have for you. It is their fate to pass unnoticed, and only by the merest accident—from long association, or the like—would they ever marry. They might fairly run the gauntlet of the society in which they move; go to places of amusement and run no possible risk. But with you, things are altogether different. I *could not* take you anywhere, and expect you to be overlooked! I am not afraid of arousing your vanity; I only want to arouse you to a sense of danger in the gift that can only prove a disadvantage to you.”

“Well, I will never long to know more of the world you so dread for us. You shall not derive any fresh trouble from me.”

At this moment the girl sitting under the tree rose and approached them.

“Is it a portrait, mamma?” she said, smilingly.

“The very pose of the head—the very attitude!” exclaimed Kate. “Mary, you have the whole talent of the family!”

“I couldn’t manage the chin,” replied the other, with some dissatisfaction, “otherwise it would be good, I think. You see, the slightest deviation from truth, there, mars the whole harmony of line. This is majestic, but it wants—oh, it wants a certain atom of tenderness that Adelaide has so strangely mixed up with her strength. It must be in the chin.”

“I should say sweetness of character would be found more in the curves of the lips,” suggested the mother.

“Or in the tip of the nose,” laughingly added Kate.

But the demure Mary answered only by covering the obnoxious chin with one of her dainty fingers.

“Isn’t that proof enough?” she asked

“ Dear, you shall try my portrait,” said Kate, with glee. “ You would not then be troubled with the confusing mixture of strength and sweetness. It would be literally all honey !” Still the demure sister did not smile. “ Or, why not paint yourself ?—except that one knows it is ridiculous to paint the lily. But, nonsense apart, you would have the most patient sitter in the world in yourself. Keep down your long fair hair, and arrange it in a sweep to your taste ; be robed—or rather half-unrobed—in the white you are so fond of wearing, and sit opposite to a pier-glass, to which you can occasionally turn those angelic orbs while you work. Upon my word, you’d anywhere pass for a saint.”

“ Which you certainly would not, my dear,” laughed Mrs. Elmore.

“ No ; I fear my tendencies are decidedly earthy. Now, come, mamma, let us send off to inquire about that pony, for I shall be in destitution if he’s sold.”

CHAPTER V.

MELODY.

MAJOR O'BUNCIOUS rather surprised the men at breakfast the following morning, by announcing his intention of going to church.

“ I don't want any of the rest of you ; but, whatever may be your games for the day, don't count on me.”

“ The major has some manœuvre in hand in which he does not wish us to be partakers.”

“ Oh, you're all as welcome as the flowers in May !” replied the major, jauntily. “ I will admit that I have a special motive, and, in admitting so much, my friend Reilly here will have his joke. However, I don't mind owning to my youthful propensities ;

so, gentlemen, you will understand it is the flutter of the feminine petticoat that beguiles me."

"But you don't know a woman here," said the colonel, puzzled.

"Exactly," replied the major, raising his black, arched eyebrows, and showing his black eyes to their widest limits. "Precisely; but I intend to know one—or perhaps a few—before long."

A sense dawned upon the colonel's mind. "Is it the recluses of the Glade?" he inquired, dubiously.

"The very mark!"

"I—I—pray you be careful, for they are really ladies, I believe."

"By my honour," cried O'Buncous, starting to his feet in pretended anger, "do you think I don't know how to treat a lady when I see one? Look to your own manners before you correct mine, Bathurst. I'll be on good terms with the whole crew of them—that is, if they are worth while."

This parenthesis of reservation was well "worth while" from its very tone. "I'll know all their pretty little manœuvres, or my name's not O'Buncous."

So the discussion ended without more ado, and they all went to church. Colonel Bathurst's square pew was well filled. This was quite a matter of excitement to the general congregation. Perhaps the more so because the major's bold eyes eagerly scanned every woman within view. But no answering beauty met his eye; and, more disappointing still, no lady whose envious veil precluded a view of her fairness. Reilly exchanged a sarcastic half-amused smile with the colonel, as they noted these searching looks, to which O'Buncous was totally indifferent. The service proceeded. In a few moments the first Psalm was commenced, and Vivian Seymour was conscious of a positive thrill of excitement, as a clear, full, magnificent voice, as sweet and fresh as the song of a lark in the morning sun-

shine, burst upon his ear. He was intensely susceptible to the charm of music, and as these glorious tones rolled and echoed through the old church, he felt himself completely absorbed by them. The voices of the choir, the congregation, and the sweet singing of the children sounded only like an accompaniment, so clearly distinct were those full, grand notes.

He looked earnestly in the direction whence that voice appeared to proceed, but could only dimly perceive a few dark figures amid the shadow of the organ loft. It was impossible to imagine this woman, whosoever she might be, was a paid performer; the matter of expense entirely precluded the idea. And the possessor of that voice must be young—that was certain; she must have had good training too—that was equally certain; and how was she to obtain that as a resident of this place? He looked round at his companions, but none of these seemed to give any sign of being beset by the same

influence. He, however, was absorbed by it, and was curiously surprised at the reaction which set in when the vicar's dry crackling words reminded him that the sermon had commenced.

Bathurst, whose nature was cordial to a fault, inclining always to the gentler tactics that are almost womanish in their care for the feelings of others, delayed leaving the church until he knew he should be just in time to have a word with the reverend and well-meaning Dormer in the porch. So, while lingering in the peaceful scene, Vivian used his eyes quite as earnestly as did the major. The latter, to the satisfaction of his curiosity, was at length rewarded by seeing three ladies descending the rude flight of stairs on the right. Three? there were four, but one might be a woman of fifty years of age, or more, with a sad yet resigned expression upon a face that was still strikingly handsome, although almost purposely unadorned by the plain black bonnet surround-

ing it. An attracting figure in itself, and quite warranted to strike an eye like the major's; but these forms following were certainly more youthful, although their steps were so sedate, and almost solemnly constrained. And their gauze veils, albeit they floated in such ravishing folds, were nevertheless quite effective in hiding even the sparkle of an eye. The major's blood ran cold as the thought occurred to him that these doubtless lovely young creatures might really be, as had been proposed, nuns in absolute fact.

The vicar had exchanged his few words with the colonel, and then turned and greeted the first of the four young ladies then crossing the porch. Vivian stood close to them as they waited their turn to pass out, and he had the satisfaction of hearing a few conventional words spoken by unquestionably the singer during the service. Although the tones were very low, they had the peculiar faculty of reaching, and

sinking, as it were, through one's very being. Vivian felt the charm in all its oppressiveness; he wondered at the sensation, and yet enjoyed it. Would she speak again? "It was indeed a lovely morning!" But who could give such melody to that common phrase as she could? But there was no other word; there was just a bend of a very graceful figure, and the dark dresses had all disappeared.

Colonel Bathurst's voice seemed to wake his nephew from a delicious dream, while the major's hilarity sounded like an incongruous discord. "Those were the ladies from the Glade, Vin; you see what chance O'Buncous has of making himself familiar in that quarter."

"What a superb voice!" answered Vivian, absently; "yet it did not appear to strike you."

"I am accustomed to it—that is, I know it belongs to one of those ladies, and that it is quite a treat to hear her sing. I did not

tell you purposely; I wanted you to be impressed, as I know you can be, by the power of music."

"The human voice is the most marvellous instrument for producing effects upon the human soul! There is nothing like sound for reaching into one's very being. With you perhaps it is not so: with some the eye does more work, and the beauty of form or colour has a far greater attraction. Indeed, I think there are various means of reaching the heights of man's nature."

"Yet I have heard men, sensible men too, say that we are safer with no love for beauty than too much," said Bathurst, reflectively.

"Any gift surely may be a misfortune badly used. What power, do you think, masters you most?"

"Mind. *I* should not be tempted by either eye or ear."

"Still you seem to seek and surround yourself with beauty; carry your love for

it to a greater extent than any one I ever knew, even to the choice of servants."

"That is a justifiable gratification ; they should be but as pictures, flowers, and adornments. One likes to have one's books well bound—at least some few people as well as Mr. Ruskin ; I myself do. Yes," he added, meditatively, "you are to understand, Vin, that your eccentric uncle is only to be overcome by the absolute power of mind."

"Then you have never seen either of those ladies ?"

"The remark is irrelevant, Vin ; still I will confess that I have not. My agent conducted the business by letter, and I remember insisting strongly on certain arrangements being made which I considered necessary, knowing there were ladies only in the case. You know what those fellows are ! They can swallow anything themselves, but they detest any one else getting an advantage ; and women, you know, are not so well able to fight for their rights just yet."

“They never will be able to fight.”

“Perhaps not ; it won’t be necessary when the *morale* of society is so far improved that justice is conceded to all, and brute force is dead.”

CHAPTER VI.

DESIGN OR ACCIDENT ?

MRS. ELMORE sat in her own especial place in the drawing-room window when Kate came in from her first ride, with her hair much dishevelled, her cheeks bright, her eyes sparkling, the dark cloth habit showing her supple figure to advantage, and all the soft folds, pulled up on one side, making as charming a picture as one would wish to dwell upon. But the mother's contemplation of all this was checked, as usual, by some gloomy thought, and the loving face saddened, while the smile ended with a sigh.

“ We have been in trouble, mamma. But I didn't faint ; that's the last absurdity I

should resort to. We only got entangled in the underwood ; my veil was twisted round a holly branch, and his tail was entangled in a furze-bush. There we both were fixed. How any one would have laughed to see us ! It's only that I'm out of practice. I shouldn't come to such confusion again. I left the shreds of my veil in the tree, for the simple reason that it was impossible to do anything else, and I would willingly have left the tail of Ajax in the furze-bush, but he objected——”

“ Kate, Kate ! ”

“ Well, it was irrational of him, but it was no use arguing. I fortunately had a pen-knife ; and fortunately, too, he was patient, and when I found I couldn't cut away the tuft of hair, then I cut the branch. So he has brought back part of the furze with him, with some disapprobation. His beauty is not irretrievably injured——”

“ I shudder to think of what might have happened.”

“Are you thinking of *my* beauty, dear ?
Pray, what is the use of it ?”

“Remember, Kate, you must not twist
your habit quite so tightly round you.”

“What can it matter what we do, mamma ?
Nobody will ever see us. And what, indeed, is the use of being healthy, wealthy, and wise, if we cannot set an example to the age, and shed a lustre on the future ?”

“Kate, you are talking utter nonsense.”

“So I am, you dear, serious old mother. But I often consider what a loss we are to the world. We strive to be perfect in physique, in manners, in temper, in mind, all for our own selfish purposes, and nobody else a bit the better for it all.”

Then the girl suddenly paused, the light of her eyes softening into a mist as she read the expression in her mother's face.

“I won't talk nonsense if you look like that,” she said, kneeling down, and clasping her firm hands, bearing traces of the recent

conflict, over the mother's knees. "I won't! and so good as you always are to me. Don't you think the *contretemps* was lucky? You need have no fear for us now; we are both so well-behaved."

Mrs. Elmore put her hand on her daughter's head, and smoothed back those rebellious locks that declined to be fettered.

"If you are satisfied, dear, that is all—*all* I want."

The pathos, the full meaning of these impressive words, sank into the girl's heart and saddened her. She put her mother's hand to her lips.

"Somebody *does* care, after all, for how we look, and what we say," she whispered. Another pause. "But this is worse than talking nonsense," she cried, springing up and putting her mother's hand upon her arm. Come—come and see his tail. He is now being cleaned. I wonder if Tom can see well enough to manage the furze?"

They walked down the garden together

towards the greenhouse, where a small stable had been erected.

“So you’re quite satisfied with him, my love?”

“Oh, I shall adore him, mamma!”

“And you think he shows no inclination to kick?”

“I believe his temper is as angelic as your own, so you need have no fear for Ajax or me. I don’t know how many times I shall have to thank you for acceding to the request of your most troublesome daughter. I *am* the most troublesome daughter, am I not?” But the mother only smiled, and the girl ran on. “You can imagine how delightfully refreshed I am after my first gallop. And you must own that I was getting quite pale and weak for want of exercise.”

Here she met her mother’s eye, and laughed at the absurdity of her own words. Her laugh was mingled with a curious, crushing sound, as of dried leaves or the crackling of broken boughs.

Both ladies started.

“What is it?” was their mutual exclamation.

The sound proceeded but from a short distance. There was a mass of shrubbery extending at some distance from the high wall of the garden. Mrs. Elmore walked quickly in the direction of the sound, saying, “Some strange dog has got in and lost his way, I suppose.”

But Kate’s blithe footstep and eager hands were quicker to the discovery. It was she who, pushing aside the rhododendrons, was the first to gaze upon the prostrate form of Vivian Seymour. His fall had been but slightly broken, for here, close under the wall, there was but thin underwood, and this had given rise to the crisp crushing sound that had been heard.

He was quite still. His eyes were closed, but there was no sign of injury, no sign of pain, no sound. Could he be killed? The girl’s startled eyes rested with wonder on

his beautiful fair face. She, who read all her poems in nature, read a fresh page as she looked there. She made no exclamation, she gazed.

“ Good heavens ! ” cried Mrs. Elmore, shrinking at the first glance. “ Run, Kate, fetch—— Go away, child ! I hope he isn’t killed. Dear me ! how could it have happened ? He’s not—go away, Kate, do ! —he’s not a tramp ; he’s a gentleman. But how could—— ? Dear me, Kate, how strange you look ; are you too frightened to move ? I don’t think there’s anything really serious, but we must have assistance.”

Mrs. Elmore was quite collected, but her voice was hurried and anxious. Kate stood still, with that fixed, strange look, not quite of fear, upon her face, as though she never heard her mother’s words. At this instant there was a loud peal at the garden bell—another—and still Kate did not seem to hear. Mrs. Elmore, unwilling to leave the spot, fell on her knees beside the prostrate

man, and touched his hand with the unconscious desire to do something. She spoke rapidly all the time.

“Some one has witnessed the accident, and is evidently anxious for admission. Do go, my darling, before they arrive !”

They had arrived ; and a singular procession they formed, as each followed the other swiftly round the curved path that led to the outer wall. No one observed them but the old man who had unfastened the ponderous door, or gate, of the Glade grounds. Waiving questions, they had passed by. Had there been a perspicacious observer he would have seen strange expressions upon these three faces. Dr. Reilly, who strode first, with an air of determination and displeasure, had an undoubted look of anxiety in his somewhat stern, thoughtful face. The rotund major followed, with something of the expectant tiptoe movement, and a sparkling anticipation of something good in his eye, and not a trace of

anxiety. On Neville, who lagged far behind, there was a kind of sheepishness, which, in a man of his order, was, to say the least, unusual.

But Mrs. Elmore read no such signs as these ; she turned her head to welcome the new-comers.

“ I fear, gentlemen, you will require help,” she exclaimed. “ Let one of you go instantly for a doctor.”

But Reilly was on his knees beside her before her words were ended. “ I am a doctor, madam,” he replied quietly, while the expression of displeasure and anxiety deepened. “ I regret you should have been subjected to this alarm the accident has, I fear—I must investigate. Madam, would you kindly order some water to be sent from your house ? ”

“ Brandy,” suggested the major, in a deep voice. Upon which Reilly turned upon him an inscrutable glance.

Mrs. Elmore rose hastily, and turned to

look for Kate ; but she in the confusion of the moment had disappeared ; so Mrs. Elmore herself hurried away on the errand.

“ How devilish well the young dog does it ! ” whispered the major, admiringly. “ Reilly, did you see that lovely creature stealing away just as we came up ? Ravishing, upon me—— ”

“ He’s hurt,” said Reilly, gruffly. “ Can’t you see this is no shamming ? ”

“ Why didn’t he jump it ? ”

“ Didn’t you hear the branch break ? He fell.”

The major looked mystified. This was “ a spree ”—or what should have been “ a spree,” he thought. What was it likely to turn into now ? A tragedy, perhaps ; and he had been the chief instigator.

“ The head must have come into contact with something,” murmured the doctor, better disposing his patient.

“ By the Lord, I think they’re both acting ! Reilly’s playing his part as well as the other.”

With a laudable desire not to be behind, O'Buncous turned to Neville, who stood abstractedly silent, "Don't look so helplessly frightened, man ! Did you never see a comrade shot before your eyes in the field, I wonder ? No ; you're a raw recruit yet. Bestir yourself ; go and assist the lady !" But producing no effect upon Neville, he stepped up to him, and with his hand to his mouth whispered the words, " Hang it, you look like a fool ! You ought to be hanging over his body ; you ought to let them see how you are affected."

" Anybody but a fool could see how I am affected," exclaimed Neville, unpolitely.

" Oh, thanks," said the doctor, as an elderly woman ran hastily up with the water.

Mrs. Elmore was looking somewhat perplexed as she stood hesitating on the steps of the drawing-room window, and looked out over the lawn.

" What *ought* I to do ? I am next to certain that he cannot be removed. One

cannot bear the thought—the mere thought of being heartless or unchristian-like. Yet such men, and young men too, it is most distressing! Where is Kate, I wonder? Fortunately the other girls are out of the way. I had better give them the morning-room; that can best be spared.”

Then, having made her decision, she turned resolutely and walked across the garden. Gracious she was, as a woman of her kind should always be, when even she determines to do a thing unpleasing to herself, and graciously she spoke. It was hardly like conferring a favour; it was more like receiving an obligation when she said to Doctor Reilly—

“Had you not better remove him to the house? Pray use my home as your own. Do not hesitate to ask for anything you require. I myself will prepare with my own hands what may be necessary. Do you think your friend is seriously injured? I can form no judgment.”

“Nor I, madam,” said Reilly, with pronounced courtesy. “I shall avail myself of your great kindness of necessity, though I deeply regret the cause, and the inconvenience to yourself.”

“How well the beggar does it,” thought the major.

“I’m afraid I must leave him now,” said Reilly, as if to himself. “We dare not convey him, but by proper means. Have you such a thing as—well, perhaps I had better go and see for myself.”

“I think I know,” said Mrs. Elmore, hurriedly. “Come with me to the greenhouse.”

She had grasped his meaning instantly, and he followed her.

The whole affair had only been the work of a few minutes, and yet the delay to Mrs. Elmore’s mind was irritating.

“The shelves are not fixtures; they can be easily removed. How dreadful to lose time like this!”

“ We have not lost a second yet,” was the quick reply. “ These will do admirably ; ” and he swiftly began to remove the flower-pots to effect a rapid clearance, while she as rapidly assisted. “ Oh, pray don’t you touch anything ! Why couldn’t one of those men have had the sense to follow me ? ’ ”

“ I’m not afraid of soiling my hands,” said she, working as rapidly as he did. “ Our old gardener will be no use ; he would be dazed at anything but his own work.”

“ I saw him—utterly incapable. Would you mind sending one of those fellows here at once ? ”

She turned on the instant, and one of “ those fellows ” was to be seen making his way towards them. It was Neville.

O’Buncous becoming curious, and thinking the matter now ripe for success, directed his steps towards the house, and, strange contingency, here was the wounded man left alone.

And now from those thick rhododendrons

came forth quietly, Kate, with pale face and awed eyes. They rested on nothing but that prostrate form, which she approached timidly, as if fascinated by it. Half unconsciously she drew from her pocket a little silver vinaigrette, and, kneeling by his side, held the strong aromatic essence to his nostrils.

It was strange to her that after a gasp, a momentary shivering of the frame, the eyes should unclose and rest full upon her. It was a singular meeting those pairs of eyes had then. Hers still dilated, calmly fixed on his ; his, clouded, dazed, gazed upon her, seeing those eyes only, as if in a halo of mist.

The seconds they looked thus seemed a space of time a thousand times repeated.

They lived hours in those seconds.

Then in a sweet low voice, that seemed to come from a miraculous distance, came the words, "Are you in pain ? Shall I lift your head ? Oh, he cannot speak ! Help, some one !" And Kate's clear rich voice rang

out to be heard by every one within house or grounds.

This was a sight, indeed, to meet a mother's eye, as Mrs. Elmore advanced, followed by O'Buncous and Reilly, carrying two heavy planks, over which the former was expending much useless exertion. This was part of the joke he had not bargained for; he really wondered at Reilly.

"Haven't we carried this a little too far?" he puffed out in an undertone, from the other end of his dusty burden.

"We are not half there," replied Reilly, angrily.

"I mean the joke," said O'Buncous, with emphatic impatience.

Mrs. Elmore appeared unnecessarily startled at the proximity of her beautiful daughter to this equally beautiful stranger.

"Kate," she whispered impressively. "Go! go away and hide yourself."

But Kate's perception of her mother's anxiety was lost in her own excitement.

“He is alive,” she said, in a low clear voice ; “he has moved.”

“That is well,” said the doctor ; and then he signalled to Mrs. Elmore to remove Kate.

The mother took the girl by the arm and led her away. “I am not wanted now,” she said.

Still Kate would have lingered. “It seems inhuman. Some help may be wanted that a woman well could give,” she whispered.

“My dear, we are quite helpless here. Come in. You are so unused to—to accident. You forget you are but a girl.”

“If I had been alone here, I should never have left him, nor remembered my girlhood any more than his manhood. Mamma, how dreadful to think that even now he may die !”

She shuddered as she half whispered the words, and her lips paled. A strangely abrupt thought came into her mind. If those eyes should never uncloze, and she

had intercepted their last look on earth, she realized that in the one long gaze her soul had learnt a new feeling, her heart had expanded to a quickened sympathy with humanity. In those calm eyes she recognized a power that had almost magnetized her, so complete was the absorbing demand to read her own. Her own? How was he impressed by those eyes of hers to which she had never given a moment's consideration in her life?

“Kate, it always is a shock to the inexperienced to witness death, or even danger. You are overstrung;” and the mother noted with pain the lovely features so unnaturally lit by her emotion.

But the girl did not hear; she slid her arm from her mother's, and went into the house before her.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REAL AWKWARDNESS OF THE POSITION.

WHILE this scene was being enacted, Colonel Bathurst was strolling about his gardens in his own quiet way, for to him real luxury was to be found in the contemplation of beauty.

When O'Buncous came in sight, Bathurst observed a strangeness in his friend's aspect, even as he approached, a sort of deferential air that sat oddly upon him. He walked on hurriedly, and spoke hurriedly and half dubiously.

"I've come — that is, I've been sent — h'm——"

"You appear to have been sent against your will," said Bathurst, jestingly.

"I've a deuced unpleasant thing to tell you!"

Then the colonel faced him. "You'd better out with it," he said.

"That precious cool young nephew of yours is in a scrape."

"Vin?"

"Yes, he. Reilly sent me off to explain; but I'll be hanged if I can."

"Do be serious, O'Buncous!"

"I can't! I don't know whether I *am* serious or not."

This Hibernianism had the effect of irritating Bathurst's serenity.

"Confound it! *be* serious to oblige me. What's wrong?"

"Well, he's just gone over a wall ten feet high, and come a cropper in the Glade gardens."

"Hurt?" demanded the colonel, imperatively.

"Damned if I know!" answered O'Buncous, helplessly.

Bathurst settled his square shoulders, and fixed an impressive gaze upon his old friend. "For God's sake, be plain! What has happened to the boy?"

Then the major grew warm. "I tell you I don't know!" he exclaimed. "I half suspect they're playing the fool with me, after all. A lark's a lark; but when you come to play a practical joke upon a man—it isn't easy to explain it to another man, that's all."

"Oh! isn't it?" observed the colonel, a little viciously. Then there was silence for a few seconds. "Perhaps you'll condescend to tell me where the boy is. I will soon discover the rest for myself."

"Didn't I tell you he was over the garden wall?" yelled the major, exasperated. "But whether he is hurt or not, I won't undertake to say. Reilly's as bad as the rest."

"Really you don't seem to be much better, O'Buncous. You must be playing a practical joke on me."

"Me? Bless me soul! I am the victim. Look here, Bathurst, boys will be boys. You can't be hard on 'em. We've been young ourselves not so long ago. The secret is, they wanted to look at the girls—heard their voices in the garden—temptation too strong, *et cetera*. Told them plainly I couldn't climb a tree——"

"But boys will be boys—you proposed it? Yes. Vin isn't the man to disgrace himself in a common escapade."

"Dash it! it's only natural."

"Natural! if a man could never see a woman but by climbing a tree. Confounded nonsense! Now, then, is it a trick? and are you all in it?"

"Just what I can't tell you!" cried the major, excitedly. "It was a joke up to the time we were outside—but I'm damned if I know if it was a joke inside—for I and Reilly carried him in on a stretcher to the house. And this I will say, the thing was precious well done—if it wasn't real. Any-

how, the game has been worth the candle, for of all the lovely, ravishing young beings——”

Here O'Buncous became aware that the colonel had resolutely buttoned his coat, and was striding away in the distance.

Then the major looked around with a thoroughly crestfallen air.

“But it will never do to be out of the hunt,” he thought, following Bathurst at a discreet distance. “By Heaven! she was a beauty. Perhaps the loveliest creature I have ever seen.”

But he was too ill at ease to enjoy even this delicious reflection, for a mortifying idea possessed him that he had been duped, and that all the party would now be aware of it.

Bathurst lost no time, and, with that perfect self-possession which was natural to him, found his introduction to Mrs. Elmore most easy. The fact really being that his earnest anxiety was so plainly apparent that she would have been less than

woman who could have met him with an unsympathetic spirit. She led him to the room at once.

“Well, Reilly?” he said, hastily, and then paused; for he could see things were wrong.

“There is harm,” said Reilly, gravely. “Principal difficulty in the ankle. No real danger. Clear your mind of that.”

Mrs. Elmore left the room.

“O’Buncous has been confusing me with a cock-and-bull story of what I can now see he was afraid to tell.”

“The most annoying thing in the whole affair is that I cannot have him moved. I haven’t yet been able to decide what injury is done,” said the doctor.

“That’s awkward, as you say. How quietly he lies! Reilly, are you *sure* he is right?”

“I’ll take care of that,” was the reply, given very earnestly. “Trust me.”

“And you will stay with him?”

“I should not think of leaving.”

Very few words between those men were sufficient.

“I shall take the opportunity of making things a little clear to Mrs. Elmore,” said Bathurst, after awhile ; and he opened the door.

At the same moment Mrs. Elmore came out of the drawing-room, and crossed the hall to meet him. Critical as he was with regard to women, at the first glance her soft retiring air, yet perfectly composed address, had charmed him. Her beauty, too, being of an unexceptional kind, might have prepossessed him, who can say ? As it was, the unmistakable good breeding, manifested by the tones of her voice, impressed him more pleasantly even than her beauty.

“It is to me a source of regret that our introduction should be of this kind. We ought to have met before,” he said.

“Perhaps. But allow me to take the opportunity of thanking you for the great consideration you have shown me in every way.”

Now he knew that she was here alluding to the many arrangements he had made for her comfort, and also that he had respected her desire for seclusion. She led the way to the room she had just left, and he followed her. There a tall statuesque girl stood confronting him, evidently preparing to take her departure. She bowed without looking at him, and passed on.

“Stay, Adelaide! This is Colonel Bathurst. You need not go away.”—Then she turned to him, and added, “My eldest daughter.”

With another grave bow the young lady returned to her seat.

“And now it is my turn to make a pretty speech to you, Mrs. Elmore; but indeed, I hardly know how to thank you for your kindness.”

“Common humanity,” she added, smiling. “What I really want to say is, that the only return I can make will be to do all in my power to assist you in this difficulty.

I have already told your friend, the doctor, that my house and servants are at his command, and if I may be allowed to add myself, I shall be better pleased."

"I have always observed, Mrs. Elmore, that women seldom do things by halves. When they are gracious, they will make a man ashamed of his paltry condescensions in the magnificence of their own."

Mrs. Elmore smiled half sadly. "That is a very gallant speech," she said. "I am not sure, however, but that it is true."

"It is true, according to my vision," he replied, unaffectedly.

Then they reverted to the accident, and Mrs. Elmore explained that certain arrangements could be made by which the doctor would be enabled to stay with his patient.

"It is a most unwarrantable trespass. I don't know that I shall ever get over it," said the colonel. "However, I am aware when an exception is made in my favour, and know how to value it."

“I must not allow you to forget that you have made exceptions in mine.”

“You are unfair to yourself, madam,” he said, with grave politeness. “The balance is so unequal.”

“My mother is always unfair to herself,” said Adelaide, her face animated into full beauty, as she lost the consciousness of reserve. “She did all she could, and will do all she can, whether you are Colonel Bathurst or not.”

“That is something like advocacy,” he answered, thinking what a lovely woman she was, and how totally unlike her mother, and feeling interested, in spite of himself, into curiosity.

“So, then, it is settled that you take that part of the house to yourself. The two adjacent rooms will be so convenient.”

“Well, then, I accept, and make no attempt to thank you now. But by allowing Doctor Reilly to take the law into his own hands——”

“Doctor—Reilly?” she asked, in a strange, surprised tone.”

“Dr. Reilly, who is now in attendance.”

“I found something strangely familiar in his face, and now the name is familiar too. And yet—the association has been long passed. It cannot be he——”

“Let me bring Reilly here?”

Bathurst arose.

“No. Let me send him here,” said Adelaide, rising. “I will remain with his patient.”

“By no means,” exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, quickly.

“Pardon, mother, it is my place. I ought to be there;” and she went out quickly.

Then Mrs. Elmore sat down again, looking pale and absent. She sighed, and remained silent until Reilly entered. The colonel, still more interested, thought she was conjecturing on the resemblance she had discovered.

She turned with a start, and seemed to suddenly awake from a dream when she looked at the two men before her.

"Excuse me," she said, with a visible effort, "was your father—you are young—was your father in the army?"

"Yes; he was in the army until two years ago."

"And a doctor?"

"Certainly."

"Arthur Kestrel Reilly?"

"The same."

Again her eyes went into the distance, and remained; and how sadly pathetic the beautiful, care-worn face looked. Both men observed her sympathetically.

There were tears in her eyes now as she turned and extended her hand, while she said, "Then you are the son of one of my husband's truest friends, one whom I shall never forget, and one to whom I owe much."

Reilly pressed her hand cordially. "I

am glad that is so ; you will have full confidence in me now."

"You had that when I first looked at you," she said, simply. "You will understand perfectly that it will be my *pleasure* to do everything that is necessary for your comfort. You will, I am sure, excuse me now. Old recollections have crowded upon me, so that I am hardly myself." With eyes still shining and a slight inclination of the head, she went out.

"Fortunate, as the case stands," was Reilly's laconic remark.

"I will take care to have everything—everything I can think of—sent to you. Save her as much trouble as possible," said the colonel, warmly.

"In that case don't send 'everything.' I will make known my requirements. The real awkwardness of the position consists in the fact that, for some reason, these ladies desire strict seclusion."

"We will see that their seclusion shall be

as strictly kept by ourselves," said Bathurst, loftily. "Why, there is O'Buncous wandering about outside. He must be warned off. I'm afraid he lacks the delicacy to meet the family upon the terms for which we are prepared. I'll give him a strong hint at once." At this point the doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Let me see, you want the large portmanteau sent round. You will see me again to-day. Good-bye." Then Bathurst hastily went out.

The major's spirits were considerably depressed, that was very evident, and for this small mercy his old friend was grateful.

"I will keep up the severity, however, to keep him out of mischief," he thought.

The old gardener was cutting a hedge; as they passed, O'Buncous put a coin into his hand. "Leave the gate unfastened to-morrow," he said, as he passed on.

But the colonel's ears had caught part of the sentence.

"Keep the gate closed," he said, in a

voice so full of stern command that the old man stopped his work, and looked up in awe, and touched his cap obediently.

“Well, you might have spoken first. I’ve wasted sixpence.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“GOOD MORNING.”

“You were right, Adelaide, in going to see Mr. Seymour yesterday. I had forgotten for the moment that it was an excellent opportunity for you to become somewhat acquainted with the outside world, since it is settled you should meet it.”

The sentence ended with a weary sigh, as though the speaker were grieved it should be so.

“I shall not expect my work outside to be with such pleasant people as Doctor Reilly and that beautiful boy. How very odd you should have known his father! Who was he, mamma?”

"I think, perhaps, I ought to tell you, Adelaide, that he was, besides being one of your father's dearest friends—that he was with him entirely during his illness in India. Your father retained the memory of that friendship to the last."

"Yes," said Adelaide, in a low subdued voice. Then she saw the figure of Bathurst walking towards the house. Mrs. Elmore had given him a key of that dreadful monastic gate which shut the Glade from the world. Adelaide hastened to change the topic. "See, there is the colonel. You wanted to speak to him about those grapes and things he showered on us."

"My dear, I have shunned the world so long that I almost shrink from meeting any one now. You *must*; therefore I will leave that to you."

"I am resolved to let no difficulties stand in my way. Fortunately I have been able to discover that I suffer no embarrassment in the presence of strangers." And Adelaide

sat down and commenced to arrange her work methodically.

Mrs. Elmore's eyes dwelt long and admiringly on the gracefully bent head, the noble brow, the pale clear complexion of this dignified woman, who seemed still only a girl to her.

Not once for the next hour did a thought of Colonel Bathurst strike the girl's mind; she worked steadily on in silence, for she was alone. Then, hearing a footstep, she rose quickly, and hastened out to intercept him on his departure.

He was going very slowly, almost unwillingly, and glancing around expectantly. "Ah, good morning! So glad to see some one. How strong a thing habit is! I can't feel I have a right to come in without a welcome."

"Would it really ease your mind to say 'good morning' before you go to Mr. Seymour?" she asked, smiling. "I will cause mamma to appear for a few seconds, if you desire it."

“By no means ! I refuse to encroach upon her generosity in any way. I only meant some one.”

“Since *any one* will do, and she is so retiring, I will try and remember that you want some one to bow to in future.”

And then he bowed with the utmost gravity ; she was equally grave.

“I know that Doctor Reilly is satisfied. He was very anxious in the night, but now he says that he is almost certain the injury is local. Colonel Bathurst, it is very extraordinary—no one has spoken of it yet, as far as I know—but, how did the accident occur ?”

He hesitated. “It may seem very extraordinary to you, but, in my anxiety for the boy, it has never once occurred to me to inquire into the matter.”

“Exactly. You were fully occupied yesterday in seeing that the doctor had all he required.”

“I actually forgot my dinner,” he said.

“My guests politely waited until they were tired.”

“I have not much sympathy for them. If anything could be less consequence than another, it would be going without one’s dinner,” she said, carelessly. “But I am forgetting my message. My mother wished me to tell you to send your delicacies a little less lavishly, unless your patient’s capacity for such things should be of an extent not shown at present.”

“I will be careful,” he said, discreetly.

“And Doctor Reilly said he must not have so many flowers in his room. You know, I go there when I like; that is my privilege. I had to give a heap of them to my sister this morning. She was in raptures with them.”

“Nothing better could be desired. Nobody goes into raptures over them in my conservatories.”

“She positively dotes on beautiful things; and our flowers, although we have plenty, are only of the commonest kinds.”

“So do I,” said Bathurst, with some enthusiasm. “I love beauty absolutely. And, here in this place, I enjoy it perhaps more than elsewhere ; for from my boyhood I remember these trees. The shape of that gnarled trunk is as familiar to my eye as my mother’s face. The Glade was always lovely.”

“It is the loveliest place I have ever seen,” she answered. “I don’t mean to qualify that opinion, mind, but at present I have really seen very little.”

They had strolled on very slowly while they talked, and were now standing under the shade of the magnificent oaks that formed the great attraction of the Glade. And surely, the attraction was great, with this rich autumn sunlight falling on those noble trees, and glimmering through their russet leaves on to the fresh green turf below, the slope winding here and there through quite natural inequalities of ground, finding a gradual descent to where could

just be seen a silver glittering streak, showing the winding curve of the river.

“When the Pierpoints lived here, my eyes were never gladdened as they are now. But the place was unoccupied for years.”

“You are, then, fond of trees?” said Adelaide.

“My mother chose this place, knowing nothing of it, entirely from this oak, which stood in the foreground of the drawing which was sent to her. There is so much latent beauty in a tree—so much hidden meaning.”

Mrs. Elmore happened to glance from a window, and saw that they were talking earnestly. Her face grew very sad as she gazed, and her lips trembled; but she turned away, and set the rebellious lips in a very firm line. Still those ominous thoughts clung to her, and they were not to be disposed of, though she had turned her eyes away. Her heart remained with that well-beloved child, who for the first

time in her life, though thirty years of it had passed by, was thrown into a position of intimacy with a man.

And indeed, Adelaide seemed most familiar with the position. She might all her life have been accustomed to walk and talk with men, considering the ease with which she did both. Certainly she felt singularly at home with the colonel.

"Do you contemplate making medicine your study?" he asked, tentatively. "I am judging from your observation before you saw my nephew."

"No, no," she answered, with a smile; "I do not aim so high. I have for many years hoped to make my life useful, and at last my mother has given her permission to my taking up some work that may be of benefit to others. So next month I am going north, to take a district among the poor."

"Have you any positive ideas?"

"Very positive," she answered, with that

charming half-smile that had no tinge of satire in it. "But—about what?"

"The duties you undertake. I am rather vague——"

"So am I—*very*. I am going to a clergyman, whom mamma once knew. His wife will instruct me at the commencement. After that I must find my own way."

"Do I understand that you have lived in strict seclusion until now?"

"We have lived in the strictest seclusion since my father's death, and that was fifteen years ago. And then even I was a mere child." After a slight pause she went on with alacrity, "So I may indeed say I have the world before me—quite untried."

"It is a very serious responsibility," he said, gravely.

"I don't intend to take the whole of the planet on my shoulders just at once. I shall find my way carefully about it at first. We can't expect to run before we can walk."

“Does Mrs. Elmore really approve? or, excuse me, does she give way under pressure?”

He looked steadily at the girl, whose face changed suddenly at his words.

“A question so difficult to answer truthfully that I would pass it, if you please.”

“Forgive me, but you have given the answer.”

“How?”

“*That* is a question difficult to answer. Still it is clear to me that she does disapprove; but, that her love being stronger than yours, she, after some struggle for what she believes to be best, gives way to you.”

The colour rushed into her face, and made her lovelier than ever.

“She *cannot* love me more,” she commenced, with angry enthusiasm; and then she stopped suddenly, and all the energy and light went straight out of her face. “I do not know,” she said, thoughtfully.

“Perhaps you are right. I am very ignorant of some things.”

He was thinking how wonderfully expressive her face was, when the faintest rustle of a dress drew his attention to another girl, fairer, if possible, than this ; for Kate’s glowing beauty was of that order which extinguished for a moment the more perfect lines of her sister. Kate was harmony incarnate. So Bathurst thought while her sweet voice thrilled him, even by the utterance of a few commonplace words, so musical was their tone.

“Mamma wants you, Adelaide. She said you must have forgotten all about the jam.”

“And so I had. This is my sister Kate, Colonel Bathurst. You’ll find in her one who thoroughly sympathizes with your intense ideas on beauty. Don’t detain Colonel Bathurst, Kate. Good morning !”

Again that dignified bow, and she was gone.

“And is your sister, then, as devoted to

jam as you are to beauty ?” he asked, playfully.

“Oh no ! She makes it principally for me. Indeed, I am quite in despair when I think of her leaving us. She does make such delicious things.”

“Do you, then, adore delicacies as you do beauty ? I have found a kindred spirit.”

He felt on totally different terms with this careless, bright young creature ; besides, her very youth gave him a freedom. He felt he was not quite his own master with her statuesque sister.

Kate laughed, not loudly, yet the laugh was clear and far-reaching. He recognized in it those particular notes Vivian had admired in church.

“Not quite as much. I do love flowers better than jam. And what exquisite things those were you sent this morning ! I don’t know the names of half of them. Now, Mary did ; she’s so clever, you know.”

“Is that another sister ?”

“Oh, I forgot; you don’t know her. Nobody knows us, and we know nobody.”

“There you have the advantage of me—I don’t know ‘nobody,’” said Bathurst, with mock gravity.

Again that delicious laugh. Mrs. Elmore heard it this time, and went to the window.

“I ought not to have sent Kate. You, Mary, have a thousand times more discretion. Go and bring her in.”

Without a word, Mary, in her white morning gown, and her fair long hair plaited in a thick mass, showing its whole length, walked with mechanical coolness into the garden, and recognizing the colonel by the merest bend of her head, without once raising her eyelids, bade her sister remember that she must not detain Colonel Bathurst, and that her laughter might disturb the invalid.

“You haven’t the least idea how my nephew dotes on sweet sounds. It would do him good to hear the faintest echo of your sister’s voice.”

“Not when he is asleep,” said Mary, briefly. And then she put her hand upon her sister’s arm, and, after the shortest adieux, Bathurst had the pleasure of watching their graceful forms disappear.

Now, Reilly, from his commanding position in a room with three windows at different angles, had seen all this, and smiled as he remembered the colonel’s grandly uttered words as to keeping up the ladies’ “strict seclusion.”

CHAPTER IX.

CONSCIENCE.

MRS. ELMORE and her three daughters had been all in all to each other for many years. They were sufficiently intelligent to be able to endure their retirement, and find all their resources within themselves. To be comparatively happy is much in this world, and this lesson their mother had constantly impressed upon her girls, knowing well that to the majority of women such lives would have been insufferably dull, while to others whose training had taught them to believe that society was the be all and end all of existence, such lives would have been simply impossible.

But she deserved her success, imperfect

though it was, for she had dedicated her whole life and thought to her children, and they never guessed how much they owed her. One result had, however, been achieved, and it was that her daughters loved her devotedly, and vied with each other in showing the tenderness of their solicitude for one who, through all her trouble, had considered them above all things.

It was a cruel fate that crossed Mrs. Elmore's path at this time. She had struggled against nature for the right ; always, as she contended to herself, verily against nature, but for the right.

And now an incident, strange as it was unexpected, had upset every plan, and had thrown her daughters into the very danger she had avoided. It occurred to her, in the depths of her anxiety, to request the girls to keep entirely to their own rooms, and not to walk in the garden ; but this seemed an overstrained measure, one that might even be apt to provoke rebellion in

the spirit if not in the letter. Again, did not each one know the path that was marked out for her in this world? Did not each one know what was to be avoided? And again, were not these men gentlemen? She had nothing to fear from them. And what could be more unlikely than that these pure, delicately reared girls, spotless as they were, should be attracted by the first man, however suitable he might be, who approached them?

For Adelaide, she could have no fear. She had been compelled to admit of her daughter's capacity to go out in the world alone. Would it not, then, be the height of inconsistency to assume that she ought not to speak to a man who had shown so much consideration, and who was, as she repeated to herself, undoubtedly so thoroughly a gentleman as Colonel Bathurst?

While these reflections passed through her mind, she observed Colonel Bathurst speaking to Kate on the lawn. Of course she was

but a child to him, and the mother saw that he regarded her in that light. Whenever they met they had merry little battles of words, and Kate was always free and unaffected before him. Still, perhaps her very anxiety made this loving woman suspicious, for of late she had noticed that Kate occasionally fell into fits of abstraction, and she knew enough of human nature to be sure that this meant some sort of change, if not mischief.

“Doctor Reilly’s compliments, ma’am ; and could he speak with you ?”

“Ask him whether he will come here to me, or whether I shall go to Mr. Seymour’s room.”

Only one week had elapsed, and although the distance had been uniformly kept to the letter of the law, yet, when any of these people did meet, they were most friendly. They could not help being so, for they were eminently suited to each other, and they all recognized this.

“Doctor Reilly will come to you if you are alone.”

And in another minute the young man came in. He closed the door, and she indicated a seat in the bay window, in which she was sitting. His step was brisk and decided, like all his movements, and his eyes were keen to match. The rest of his features were, however, rather of the solid, thoughtful type.

“So like his father,” she thought. “Certainly a man to trust in any degree.”

The keen, grey eyes softened considerably as they gazed upon her.

“You are not looking quite so well—a little harassed, I should say. I am sure, Mrs. Elmore, you are not well.”

“You did not come to say that,” she answered, with a smile that chased the care from her face; “and—true to your profession, I perceive. Allow me to say that you look paler than you did a week ago.”

Then he smiled.

“Yes ; I’m not used to confinement. But your rooms are delightfully airy, and light, and healthful.”

“Yes. I have given some thought to such things for the children’s sake. Won’t you be seated ?”

“I first want to ask you if you have any objection to have the door open when your daughter is singing ? I find my patient, who is passionately fond of music, is soothed and delighted when he hears her. If by such means we could lessen the distance between them, would you object ?”

“Most certainly not. I will tell Kate. She will be going to practise in a few minutes. She is bidding Colonel Bathurst good-bye now.”

Then Reilly went out quickly—he did everything with the same decision—and opened the door of Vivian’s room. Then he returned to her, and presently the strains of Kate’s grand voice were heard singing one of Storace’s most pathetic ballads.

They could almost hear the words from where they sat.

“What a magnificent voice she has! It would make her fortune in the world.”

“I believe that,” said Mrs. Elmore, quietly. “But a fortune would be no use to Kate.”

“I don’t know that a fortune is the most desirable thing in the world,” said he, following her tone. “Yet it appears somewhat a pity so great a gift as that should be wasted.”

“I think so too,” she said, calmly.

Then they both paused to listen to “Down by the River,” the impassioned music, the pathetic words melting together, thrillingly united by the girl’s fresh, clear voice.

“When chill blows the wind, and tempests are
beating,
I’ll count all the clouds as I mark them retreating;
For true lovers’ joys, well-a-day! are as fleeting.”

By the time the refrain was ended, Mrs. Elmore’s eyes were full of tears. She shook

them away a little angrily. "You are right ; I am out of sorts to-day. That song always affects me ; it is association."

"I'm not surprised that any one should be affected by that sympathetic voice. I am, although I do not know the words. Your daughter's training has been——"

"More of nature than art. I have taught her all I knew, and she has gone far beyond me. I knew that I was giving her a pleasure of a lasting order. More than that—a joy ; so I spared no pains."

"Will you think me unjustifiably impertinent if I ask you one question?" said Reilly, knowing he was taking a risk, and prepared for it.

He need not have been afraid ; she was only too glad to accept help from such a man as he, and she felt weak and desponding.

"You are mystified about us, that is the truth, Doctor Reilly, and I do not wonder that you should be. However, some things are, as you know, very hard to talk about.

I need not, therefore, enter into painful details, although I still have the most earnest desire to inform you that there is urgent and overpowering reason why my daughters should not marry. I am, perhaps, one of the most unhappy women on the face of God's earth, because my cross is so hard to bear. In some things I am blest. In my daughters I have every reliance, every satisfaction. I am speaking to you quite without reserve. Their hearts are as good as their minds are rational; therefore I have been able to deal with them as I have dealt. But, unfortunately, they are beautiful. You know that," she added, apologetically. "If it had not been for that, I could have acted so differently! I could have travelled with them, given them varied interests. But can I do anything but seclude such girls as these?"

She looked so painfully earnest as she uttered these words that Reilly hesitated. It was unlike him.

"Ah!" she said, "even your decision falters, I can see."

"No, Mrs. Elmore. I am thinking how I can express myself to you. I have thought over the matter many times since it has been my privilege to be in this house. I have much to say."

"Say what you like," she said. "I have heard no man's voice in any matter that concerns me, and I should be gratified to know what you really think. You cannot offend me, for I know you will speak according to your conscience; and I know that I can trust you."

"Then," said he, "I will begin by assuming that your decision is one that admits of no dispute."

"There can be no doubt of that," she said, emphatically.

"Then we will start there. You admit that your daughters are beautiful. They are eminently attractive. You have made them so. From your high moral standpoint

you have drawn them up, so to speak, by your side. You have spared no study, no thought for their welfare. I need not tell you that I have observed the beauty and the freedom of their movements, the splendid developments of physical strength and physical grace."

"Ah! yes, *you* have observed," she said, warming to the subject. "I have succeeded in making them healthy and strong. This I value more than beauty."

"There are two views in which we can regard this matter. I will show you. First,—forgive the abrupt question—have you been wise in doing this?"

"Wise?"

"There is not a doubt in your mind. Now, I have one in mine. It is a view we should not omit to take. You know something of physiology, and if I make no mistake you know something of psychology too. Now, when you produce a creature as near perfection as it can be, the natural

demands upon that creature will equal the standard of its perfections. If your girls were destined to lead the lives of women, all this would be well—nothing could be better. But if they had grown up sickly, puny, half-formed specimens of humanity—Mrs. Elmore, of course, you do know how materially the health goes to produce and retain beauty.”

She nodded assent.

“If, as I say, they had not been so admirably reared, your position would be much easier ; and so would theirs.”

“I *hope* I do not understand you. It is cruel.”

“But it is, unfortunately, true. Their instinct, heart, and brains will demand more than you can possibly give them ; therefore I think they will be the greater sufferers on account of their perfections.”

“Your meaning is quite clear to me ; but I am ready to admit that such an argument never once occurred to me. Still there is

another side even to your view. I hope—I believe that their minds are capable of dealing with the difficulty philosophically, which could not be if they had had no training.”

“Then why do you hold it necessary to withhold them entirely from society?”

“Because, doctor, I know the strength of human passion! I know that temptations would assail them, and I would save them pain. As it is, they have resources within themselves that many women of the world have not. And we must remember that many thousands of women, from force of circumstances alone, or fate—call it what you will—are destined to lives of unhappiness, disappointment, and regret.”

“Exactly. But these women have had their chances in life. They have not deliberately chosen their misfortunes; they may be often aware their own mistakes have been the cause. But there has not been absolute denial of all natural feeling, and the

candle is burnt out, the force spent. You cannot light it again ; it is gone ! The light, the heat, the strange overwhelming mystery of life is before all your girls, and they may not turn a page to unriddle it. I pity them, Mrs. Elmore, much more in their beautiful energy and health than I should if they were half-bred, ill-constructed beings, who have positively no rights to marry at all."

"You regard the matter in a purely physical sense, and I have overlooked that in the moral. According to my conscience I have done well ; but it does not follow that I have been right. Plainly, what do you think I ought to have done ?"

"Wrong can never be right under any circumstances. It is like making a wonderfully balanced machine with infinite care, and then trying to reverse the whole action of it—sending round the wheel the opposite way. Like ? Why, the simile is profane. It is taking one of God's finest, most delicate, most sensitive organizations,

and forcing all the finer germs of being into slow annihilation."

Mrs. Elmore's face was full of pain as she listened to those words. They went home to her keenly, for she had had her day, and it had been fine—ay, glorious—up to its meridian, when the clouds had gathered thick and fast around her.

"I cannot help being honest. There is no help if one does not speak one's mind," he said softly, seeing her shudder at his strong words.

"And yet my girls have not been unhappy," she said, thoughtfully.

"Their time has not come. It would come if you kept them locked in an enchanted castle, for they are human. Do you conceive it to be possible that by reason of some undue trial and a naturally exalted mind, you have arrived at an exaggerated idea of right?"

At this question, delicately as it was put, Mrs. Elmore exhibited great uneasiness.

“There can be no doubt of that. As I have told you, the subject is extremely distressing, and nothing could possibly alter my opinion. Therefore will you please take it for granted that conscientiously my daughters are as fully convinced of the absolute reason for their misfortune as I myself.”

He saw now that she meant to keep the secret. He inclined his head as accepting this decision, and went on—

“Well, then, since they so well understand their position, and are so well prepared to meet it, since they are intellectually and morally superior to ordinary young women, why deny them the natural desire for society? You dread pain. I would say, with minds so trained, your girls will have happier lives by realizing a passion and overcoming it, than by bearing within them a never-satisfying infinite want.”

This suggestion, strangely enough, did not appear to distress her.

“And with their training do you think

they might resist the temptation?" she asked.

"Ask me if you think a bird can clip his own wings?"

'Who stems a stream with sand
And fetters flame with flaxen band,
Has yet a harder task to prove—
By firm resolve to conquer love,'

or nature, it's the same thing."

Then there was silence. In a moment it was broken most musically by Kate's voice trilling a cadence as she came across the hall. Mrs. Elmore composed her countenance; Reilly leant back in his chair.

"Why, what a dreadful pair of old gossips you are!"

"Kate!"

"But you are. I forget—perhaps you haven't been talking. I always do, you see, and I suppose it's only natural to judge from one's own experiences."

"It's a good starting-point," said Reilly, gravely.

“Yes, if one can go on with one’s experiences ; but I can’t. Well, good-bye ! I’m going for a scamper on Ajax. I’m dying for action.”

There was a vein of tenderness through the wild girlish words, and she hovered about her mother as she spoke. Then she put her hand upon Mrs. Elmore’s shoulder, and stooping over caressingly kissed her cheek.

“There, dear, run away.”

“Have I committed a solecism, mamma ? I do hope it wasn’t wrong to kiss you. If it was, Doctor Reilly, you must excuse it, because I know no better.”

She made him just the least inclination at parting, and went to put on her habit.

“She is like a child,” said her mother, gravely.

“In some ways, yes. I think you would find her quite as much advanced as even your eldest daughter in others.”

“Oh ! you are mistaken. Adelaide is a

totally different character ; she is discretion itself, her feelings are under thorough control. Kate will, I fear, never be like that."

"Then you will not send her out into a strange country without guidance, as you do the admirable woman I have had the pleasure of seeing much during my stay here."

"You *are* cruel ! Cannot you guess how I have tried to prevent that ?" He rose, took her hand, and held it. With deep compassion he said, "I feel too strongly, sympathize too deeply with your sorrow, to be anything but faithful to the trust you have reposed in me. I believe I have some truth on my side. And may I be allowed to say one thing upon which I have no doubt ?—for your daughter who is about to leave you it is impossible to give too much liberty. You understand this ?"

"I think you will see that I have done that. I have gone so far as to put her in the way of yourself and Colonel Bathurst."

After this serious discussion Mrs. Elmore's perplexities increased. She began to doubt her own wisdom, for it was undeniably true, as Reilly had said, that the time should come when these girls would insist, as Adelaide had already, on taking some line for themselves.

"Oh that they had been boys," she thought, in the bitterness of her spirit ; and even as she half uttered the words, she recognized that if they had been boys her conscience, however strong, could only have helped to influence them ; she never could have prevented them from any step save by persuasion.

After all she decided to take the fairest view of things, and for the next few weeks allow her daughters the freedom Reilly deemed expedient. Under her very eye, their every footstep watched, with men such as these who were bound in honour to protect her, could there ever be a safer opportunity ?

Perhaps it was because he had nothing else to do ; but for whatever reason, it certainly happened that Reilly's mind dwelt continually on the curious circumstance that had been brought before him. He asked Bathurst one morning whether he had formed any idea about the strangeness of the whole proceeding as they knew it, and the colonel merely shrugged his shoulders and gave a very emphatic denial.

"You are the man, Reilly, to 'have an idea," he said.

"No, you are the man full of ideas. I have many a conversation with your nephew now, and he is always quoting you. You know your notions are sometimes received as queer?"

"I do—by men who can't comprehend me."

"And you know that I do. Well, you give me credit for thinking things out, but here there is a dead block. I can get at nothing. I only surmise."

"Yes?" inquired Bathurst, expectantly.

"Monomania," was the laconic reply.

"The devil! The very last thing that would have occurred to me."

"I should naturally take such things into consideration," said Reilly, modestly.

"Oh, it's a fact!" exclaimed Bathurst. "You've got it, Reilly! It accounts for everything. Now, I don't mind telling you that I get more interested in this household day by day, and I really think that from a humanitarian point of view we had better take the thing up."

"There you go ahead of me," said Reilly, quietly.

"Why, don't you see? cure the mother—surely you don't think it's a case of monomania all round—and earn the everlasting gratitude of three as beautiful and irresistibly charming women as ever existed!"

"You're as warm as O'Buncous."

"Warmer. O'Buncous only talks heat—I feel it. Without levity, I think I have a duty here."

“ If *you* think you have a duty, colonel, a wall forty feet high won’t stop your gallop.”

“ Hush ! who is that singing ? ”

It was not a woman’s voice ; it was a rather husky undecided baritone, lifting itself up with great expression in the “ Minstrel Boy ”—

“ In the ranks of death you’ll foind him.”

“ It must be O’Buncous. ‘ In the ranks of death,’ indeed—running after a petticoat. What do you think Kate called him yesterday ? She was talking to me alone, you know, and she said ‘ that comical old man.’ ”

“ Just like her,” laughed Reilly. “ She fools him to the top of his bent.”

“ And snubs him unmercifully.”

“ He must be well used to that.”

“ Well, Reilly, are you going in for it ? ”

“ I haven’t thought it out yet.”

“ But if you are not for me, you will not be against me ? ”

The answer was a penetrating, half-amused glance.

“I see you suspect me,” said Bathurst, “so I may as well admit without circumlocution that I mean to see the end of the mystery—of course, for the good of the community. You can keep Vivian in the dark, and also keep him on his back.”

“Here you touch me on a point of honour. My professional reputation is concerned. As soon as Seymour can move, he must be moved. But I know what you mean ; we’ll hang about as long as we can for the ‘good of the community.’ Seriously, I am desperately sorry for Mrs. Elmore ; she is in such downright earnest, is such a thorough lady, and is so perfectly clear and rational in every thing else, that it really becomes a doubly interesting matter to me, knowing her indirectly as I do.”

“Then why should you hesitate ?”

“One never knows the results,” said Reilly, impressively.

A slight sound from an electric bell.

“That’s Seymour ; I’m off.”

“So am I,” said Bathurst. He saw a certain grey dress upon the lawn.

The rooms communicated ; a few steps took Reilly to Vivian’s side. For once, the now pale, delicately handsome face was filled with an expression of vexation.

“Can’t you manage to stop that infernal row ? O’Buncous is making himself such a fool. It really reflects upon us to permit it. Hark at him now ! Listen to his emphasis.”

The deepest disgust was expressed by words, but the expression of his face showed more.

O’Buncous was deep in “Green grow the Rushes O !”

“Ye’re naught but senseless asses O !
The wisest man the world e’er saw,
He dearly lo’ed the lasses O !”

“Poor old fellow ! he can’t sing,” said Reilly, soothingly, and repressing a smile. “But the sentiment’s good enough ; no one can deny that.”

“Confound the sentiment ! It’s the lady

I'm thinking of. It must be agony to Kate."

Reilly opened his eyes. "I'm inclined to differ; I have heard her laughing much. Whether at him, or with him, who can say?"

"It is most irritating to *me*," said the young man, composing his features and closing his eyes.

"Never mind, my dear boy. Your regard for the comfort of these ladies, who have been so good to you, does you honour. But I can tell you that Miss Kate Elmore is not the girl to put up with more than she chooses of the society of any man, and I know a great deal more of her than you do."

"Do you? I doubt that," said Vivian, languidly.

He had lain there for hours, and had fed his romantic fancy with some of the most passionate visions youth ever dreamt. From the first moment his imagination had been powerfully excited by this brilliant,

fascinating beauty, upon whom his eyes had rested but once. But for his ears—they had drank in every sound, for he was impressed by music more deeply than by the whole influence of the senses.

Reilly was a discerning man. "I admit that I know more of Miss Elmore, whose intimacy I have fortunately been able to cultivate, than of Miss Kate. Although you are quite right—people may know each other by intuition sometimes, but that is rare. I am going to wheel your sofa to the window to-day; you'll find it a delightful change."

"What a good fellow you are, Reilly! As for me, I am an impatient monster."

"If it pleases you to think so," was the polite reply. "It is often expedient to humour a patient."

Then he carefully drew the huge old-fashioned sofa to the window, and arranged Vivian in a half-sitting posture, so that he could see part of the garden and those

admirable trees that were the glory of the Glade.

“How delicious the air is !”

“Yes. There’s nothing like being deprived of a thing to appreciate it thoroughly. Now, there’s another lesson for you to mark, learn, and inwardly digest, while I go and stretch my legs. Here’s the bell. Now, mind, if you’re cold have the window shut. But I think the rug will protect you, and there’s no draught.”

“Don’t hurry back ; I shall be all right.”

CHAPTER X.

DEVELOPING AN INTEREST IN SHELLS.

“ When Beauty bright
My heart’s chain wove.”

PERFECTING a scheme of his own, Reilly went straight to the drawing-room, and, with an excuse readily invented, disposed of O’Buncous. Then he turned to Kate.

“ You do not find him tiresome, I hope ? Seymour has suffered much from his musical eccentricities, and he seems to think that you must necessarily suffer more.”

She laughed. Of all the delightful sounds that ever issued from human lips, this laugh of hers was one of the sweetest. Reilly, whose senses were not so acutely sensitive

to the "concord of sweet sounds," yet acknowledged the charm.

"*He* has enjoyed himself," she said. "And don't you derive pleasure from seeing another thoroughly happy? I do. I think I could endure anything if I were quite sure somebody else liked it."

"Miss Kate, your philosophy is admirable, and, allow me to add, most original. Now this chance remark of yours makes my task easy. Having sacrificed half an hour of your time in charity on the major, perhaps you will be willing to make somebody else happy."

She looked full at him most unsuspectingly, and gave a little nod.

"Put on your garden hat, and stroll round by Mr. Seymour's window. He has been very low to-day, and I am sure that a few minutes of your bright presence would be more good than all the medicine in a chemist's shop."

A startled, strange look came into her

face, and she lifted her great innocent blue eyes that looked so dreamy, so solemn, when they were not laughing.

The slight compression of Reilly's lips told a tale that she could not read.

Kate made no answer.

"You do not mind?" he asked, gently. "He would be so glad of an opportunity to thank you for the pleasure you have, perhaps unwittingly, afforded him."

Her perfect freedom with himself and Bathurst, to say nothing of the childish play to which she condescended with O'Buncous, was before his mind. To what, then, could he attribute this shrinking from the interview?

"No, I can't do that," she replied, quickly.

Reilly accepted the denial with a grave bow.

"I will go if you wish it," she said, a little breathlessly, and so seriously that he could scarcely help betraying some surprise.

However, she was quite beyond noticing that. She went out without a glance at him ; the merry lips composed into a serene gravity, that made them sweeter than ever.

“She’s the sort of girl to turn any man’s head, especially one of the temperament of Bathurst, or his nephew.”

He watched her, and from where he stood saw that she played unconsciously, perhaps nervously, with the hat she picked up from the great oak table in the hall.

“I wonder what will come of it all ?” he thought. “There’s that fair saint-like girl, who dresses always in white, has been sitting out there in the shade sketching for the last hour. I wonder if she’s dumb ? I shouldn’t be surprised at anything.”

Kate was conscious of making an effort ; too conscious to find the sensation agreeable. Still her instinct taught her, and her training had helped to teach her, to fight out mere sensations ; so she drew up her head, and walked bravely on.

What was it she was called upon to do ? A mere trifle, surely. Then her vivid imagination conjured up the expression of those languid eyes showing their pain—and something beyond pain—when she thought that he was dying. And although never since had she assumed the faintest interest in him, never once had she uttered his name, her ears had been miraculously quick to catch the least reference to him. And had she not sung to him, knowing that she sung to him alone, though he was not present ?

Could it be that she had walked so fast ? Why should she be quite out of breath when she came within view of that window ? She was fully conscious of a cowardly wish to turn and run away, and gave her foot a little impatient stamp as she recognized it.

Well, there was no one there. She could pass by and escape. Tremulously and very slowly she did pass by, and, glancing once in the direction of Seymour's window, discovered that he was there, and that his

eyes were closed, as the head rested back on that very crimson cushion she herself had knitted.

Her light step did not disturb him. She paused. How very pale he was ! She knew that he had suffered a great deal, and had borne his pain heroically. Then she forgot herself entirely, and went close to the window, putting one hand upon the sill, and spoke with all the beautiful impulsiveness of her nature.

“ I am very glad you are so much better,” she said, softly.

Then Vivian opened his eyes. For the moment his courage forsook him ; the colour rushed into his face.

“ You are very good,” he stammered.

And then both were silent.

Kate relapsed at once into that oppressive nervousness that was so new to her.

“ Did I disturb you ? ” she asked, shyly.

He had gained a little time.

“ Oh no, Miss Elmore. But the air has

acted like a strong stimulant upon me. I recognized your voice, and thought I was dreaming. I adore your voice."

"I am very glad," she said, simply.

Her eyelids drooped all this time. Perhaps he was pleased that they should. He was recalling the face upon which he had gazed but for a moment, that had haunted his sleeping and waking dreams. He wanted to make every line, every curve, every tint his own; to be as familiar with the face as he was with the voice. It seemed as though he had already reached his desire, so completely did the actual harmonize with the ideal.

"Now, Reilly," thought he, "would explain this keen perfection of memory to something in the retina."

Kate's hand lingered among the jessamine. "There is some in bloom here, but you cannot see it."

She picked a branch and gave it to him. It was quite a natural, careless act on her

part; anything was easier to her than to stand still and be silent.

Vivian, on the other hand, was too contented for speech. He even took the flower in silence, and played with it half lovingly.

“It is a delicious odour; it reminds one of spring flowers. How flowers thrive here!”

Kate paused after this speech, which she was painfully aware was quite unlike herself. She could not account in the least for this palpitating reserve which was half delightful, half irritating. She looked up and met his eyes for just one moment; that was as much as she could bear. Then she made another hurried, commonplace remark for mere relief from the silence. How composed and satisfied he was, and how hot and trembling she was becoming!

“Do you like Adelaide?”

He must answer this.

“It would not be polite to say ‘I don’t,’ but really the word is too insignificant. I

admire your sister, and I have a very great respect for her. I hope I shall be able one day to show her how I appreciate her kindness. It is a great boon to a man deprived of society even to see a lady, if he be not

‘Blind to the sunshine of a woman’s smile,
Deaf to the music of a woman’s voice.’

I have always felt that a lady’s mere presence is of inestimable value to those who are really ill and suffering. We have proved it among our soldiers, you know.”

“Adelaide thinks she might be of some use in nursing, if she should fail in what she has undertaken.”

“I have not heard what that is.”

“Principally cooking. The art has been much neglected in this country, according to the best authorities. She has some hope of founding a school.”

“What drudgery for a woman like that!” exclaimed Vivian.

“She would not like to hear you say so.”

"Then she shall not."

"One must have some aim in one's life. By mere accident she hit upon the study that pleased her. She first commenced for change of occupation. I haven't found my interest yet."

He looked at her in surprise. "Has not music been your absorbing study? I am sure it has been a pleasure."

"I do not deny my interest in music, but it is not absorbing."

"I think it is almost too much to expect an absorbing interest. That can only arrive."

"That's what mamma says. She knows we shall all find satisfaction in time. I've been trying to get up an interest in shells, but they are so difficult to get."

"Yes. I don't know any place about here," he said, vaguely.

Then Kate laughed. Her eyes brimmed over as she read his discomfiture.

"Oh no!" she said. "But I've been

exceptionally lucky ; I've three oyster shells already, and Major O'Buncous has promised me a mussel shell. He says he'll steal some for me, or beg contributions. What a funny old fellow he is ! One can't help being nonsensical with him."

"It is difficult," said Vivian, going into raptures over the mobile countenance that gained so much in its varied expressions. "I'll contribute at once," he went on, gaily. "Here is a specimen in some pocket," he said, as he commenced to search. "I found it among some things I had brought back from my last foreign service. You shall give it a name ; I can't."

And then he gave her a tiny shell. Their hands touched, and, slight as the touch was, it thrilled each one with singular force. It frightened her, and sent her eyelids down, and composed the lines of that sensitive mouth. Vivian, not desiring to analyze, simply enjoyed ; but he did not want to close his eyes now.

"I'll go and find out the name," she said, shutting up the gift in her soft palm.

"No, no! don't go——" "For all the shells in creation," he would have added, but feared.

He looked quite as anxious as his words appeared to be.

"I will come back. Would you really not rather be alone?"

"I hate to be alone," he said, vigorously. Then she sped away like a lapwing over the grass, and Reilly suddenly appeared.

"You should not give your secret thoughts to the world, my young friend," said he, sauntering up. "You have only to summon me—touch the bell, or rub the lamp, and here I am. Why, you're looking ten days better. Still, I think you have had enough of it; the sun's going down."

But Vivian knew that his sun was rising.

"Not yet," said he, hesitating. "Miss Elmore is coming back."

"Ah, then I'll go away. I'm half afraid

of that girl ; there's something magical about the way she uses her eyes."

"Uses her eyes !"

Reilly marked the tone of displeasure.

"Don't take exception to a genuine remark. There's no implication on the young lady ; she does not know it."

She came up. "The name is *Elenchus nitidula*. I think I've got it."

"And what is this 'it' ?" asked Reilly, intercepting her.

"What lamentable ignorance for a scientific man !" she exclaimed, with an affectation of contempt that would have been superb in high comedy. She was quite at ease, now Reilly was present.

"I deplore my ignorance," said he. "Will you give me twenty answers—yes or no only—and let me guess ?"

"Don't," said Vivian, emphatically. "He'll find out to a certainty ; he does it by a system. He can discover anything."

"I defy him !" She met his eyes merrily,

and, holding out the little hand clenched, made a picture that would gladden any man's heart. "Go on," she said.

"Inanimate?" he asked.

"Must I be quite accurate?"

"Quite."

"Then I will take counsel."

She leant upon the window-sill, and in a playful whisper asked how she could explain that it had not been always so.

"But the shell never lived," said Vivian, laughing. "There's no chance of the fish being alive now."

"But surely if it were alive we should calculate the shell as part of it? Don't they grow together?"

Vivian looked slightly puzzled.

"But anyhow, it's all dead now," he said.

"Yes," she answered, turning to Reilly.

"Two heads are better than one," he said.

"Mineral kingdom?"

"No," answered Kate, quickly.

But she found it necessary again to appeal

to Vivian in an undertone. "I suppose that's right? But what is a shell composed of?"

"I don't know at all," he replied, so gravely that Reilly interposed.

"There will be no chance for me if you go on like this," he said. "Vegetable?"

"You're sure it's not formed by encrustations of seaweed?" she asked, laughing, while Seymour leaned out to listen to her.

"I'm not sure. But I think it must become animal when it's part of a living thing," he answered.

"And when the living thing deserts it, it returns to its normal condition. I couldn't conscientiously say it was an animal. He's sure to ask me that next."

"Miss Kate, you must be lamentably ignorant," commenced Reilly.

"But then, I'm not a scientific man! But I do wish to be accurate, and Mr. Seymour is of no use whatever. He knows less than I do."

"Then why appeal to him?" asked Reilly, with some show of reason.

"Because it's so natural to appeal to somebody for help—whether you get it or not, it's a comfort."

Reilly caught Vivian's eye, and both men laughed spontaneously.

"Oh, I forget, you are men; you never know such weakness."

The sound of their laughter attracted Mrs. Elmore to the spot. She had just gone out in search of Kate.

"Do come here, mamma," the girl cried, as she approached; "you'll be delighted. I am developing such an interest in shells."

Then she stopped suddenly, caught Reilly's eye, and put her hand over her eyes as though in shame. She was so full of unconscious beautiful action that it was grateful to the sense merely to watch her.

Mrs. Elmore's countenance was expressive of mild surprise.

"The cat is out of the bag," said Reilly, gravely. "She has betrayed herself."

“How puzzled you look, mamma! We were playing a game, and the doctor is a necromancer.”

“Ah, you will never be able to keep a secret,” said he. “My divination has gone as far as that.”

“I hope she will never have one to keep,” said Mrs. Elmore.

And there was more meaning in the quiet words than these young people knew.

CHAPTER XI.

NETTLES FOR TWO.

“THE fact is, Bathurst, you’re always there. What do you find to say to the old lady, eh? I prefer the young ones.”

“Ah, you are perfectly safe, you see,” said Bathurst, sententiously.

But O’Buncous was beyond the keen edge of satire.

“You’ve got some game on ; you always were a sly dog. It’s your quiet pigs, you know, that run away with your loud ones’ meat.”

“No wonder they make a row, then !”

“It’s what I call a devilish lucky event —barring your nephew ; for it’s brought

me into contact with, perhaps, the only woman who has ever reached my heart of hearts."

"And how many do you imagine you have the originality to possess?"

"You don't understand metaphor; your soul isn't poetic. They're splendid women, all of them! Either taken separately would be enough to settle any man's hash. I dare say a good many might vacillate between them, but I go straight to the mark. By-the-bye, which of 'em do you prefer?"

"Awkward thing if we should prefer the same woman," said Bathurst.

"Oh, you needn't make a joke of it! I'm serious."

O'Buncous brought his eyebrows together in a frown to prove it.

"So am I."

Bathurst looked quite as serious.

"But we have given up duelling," he said.

"Well, let's trust we shan't clash; for,

though all's fair in love and war, I shouldn't exactly like to cross your designs."

"Enough of nonsense! These ladies are, as we well know, placed in a very exceptional position. As I am situated, with regard to them peculiarly, it behoves me to give you a serious hint in the matter. They have been very good to Vin, and exceedingly polite to us all. It becomes my especial duty to spare them any annoyance."

"As much mine as yours, Bathurst," exclaimed the major, hotly; "for I never, as the poet says, 'laid my hand upon a woman, save in kindness,' except once. I do remember once. She was a laundress; and I had stood a good deal, as it concerned buttons and splits; but when it came to finding myself without a change of linen, and she pressing for her bill—hang it! I might have had a drop too much, but I shoved her out of my room—clean out, I did, by George!"

O'Buncous told of the incident with great earnestness.

"You ought to have been ashamed of yourself," said Bathurst, laughing.

"So ought she. But I never heard of her again, nor of my linen."

"Come, it's too late to regret that, especially considering the condition it was in."

"Oh, it was used up, I admit. But to return, my mind is dwelling upon an affair of the heart. I'll keep my secret, since you intend to keep yours. I must sound Reilly. I shouldn't wonder if he had one too."

"Well, as long as you keep it all to yourself and Reilly, no harm can be done. As you say, a man can't help his feelings."

Notwithstanding this conversation, Bathurst felt uneasy that afternoon when he saw O'Buncous offer Kate his arm, to take her for a walk by the river.

"But he never can be fool enough! He

was always an exaggerated talker, saying more in a minute than he would swear to in a month."

But the uneasiness faded as he saw Adelaide approach.

"Good morning," she said. "You'll be delighted to find great improvement in Mr. Seymour to-day. Dr. Reilly proposes that he should be wheeled out in a large arm-chair; it's so easy here, the house being nearly level with the garden. We think he would enjoy the change of scene as much as the air."

She spoke to him with great ease and perfect familiarity. They had not met before that day, so he took her hand.

"Pray, how am I to address you?" he asked, retaining it; "as nurse, as doctor, or what?"

"As cook, if you please," she said lightly, dropping the smallest curtsy; just an attempt at one, for the sake of regaining her hand without awkwardness.

He was a man of experience, and saw through the action and the motive.

“But surely you don’t cook wholly and entirely?”

“No; but all delicacies I do. Chemistry of food and scientific cooking are my serious studies. The preparation of little nutritious dishes is a recreation to me. I must make experiments.”

“It is a matter in which I have always taken great interest—a very strong interest. At one time the condition of my own health demanded it; but being a man, I have, unhappily, been at the mercy of any one in that respect. I never should have regained my health if I had not been fortunate enough to hit upon my present house-keeper.”

“Since we are only straying, pray let us follow Kate. I saw her going down the path in the most dignified manner with Major O’Buncous. I think they were aping the old style of courtly manners. He appeared to be

showing her some steps in dancing. Yes, as you say," she continued, returning to the interesting theme, "men are, it is understood, unable to comprehend the simplest matter that often appertains to their own comfort. It is an inconsistency that I have been as yet unable to fathom."

"The fact is, it takes a man of genius to be a cook, though any man, it seems to me, might be able to cook a meal."

"It is comprehensible that we should not wish to waste our men of genius in that way ; they are not so common. Still, men have more weight in the world than women, and, while they have it, it seems a pity we should not have a Soyer now and then. It would do inestimable good. You see, 'ladies' won't take the thing up, and poor women can't afford to ; they can only do the best for themselves. It is among these I should wish to work. The thing most to be regretted at present is, that the poorer people spend money on that which is of no

use. I feel convinced that many women who have to feed a family upon small means would be glad to learn how to produce a dish that would form a good and really palatable meal for a few pence."

"This is the utilitarian view. I have never considered it in that light," he said.

"No. Yet it seems perfectly easy to prepare a dish both good and delicious where one can choose one's ingredients from all the produce of the earth, irrespective of expense."

"Certainly; but it isn't often done."

"I have often thought," said Adelaide, reflectively, while she scanned the path close by the water, where she expected to find Kate—"I have often thought that, with such a world as I read of, there is something inexpressively painful in knowing that where thousands have only to consider how they can augment their luxury, and consequent waste, millions, even though they should be thrifty, can only obtain

coarse and insufficient nourishment. In case of sickness, they must be wholly unable to obtain bare necessities. Knowledge would be an improvement," she added, thoughtfully. "Knowledge would make the smallest pittance go farther."

"Ah, Miss Elmore, you have thought of other things besides cooking. It has sometimes occurred to me, when dining with men who simply strive to outvie each other in the expenses of their entertainments, that the money might be more appropriately spent, and the stomachs of the guests be spared a deal of unnecessary trouble. I hope you don't think me a mere *gourmet*."

She looked at him reproachfully.

"You cannot think so."

"But would you say so?"

"I think I should like to say anything I thought true, when occasion demanded it, although I'm anything but sure I have the courage. There is Kate, frog-hunting."

"If O'Buncous stoops like that, he'll be in

head first in a minute. Give me an idea of some of these dishes?"

"It appears we waste so much of our meat by the process of baking or roasting, and very few understand how to stew a small quantity of coarse meat or fish, with common vegetables or pulse. We have had many such dishes from my experiments, and have found them unexpectedly good. It is amazing the errors one might make at first, for theory always seems to be at fault when we come to practice. I suppose that a very trifling error might spoil the broth. Did you ever taste anything less 'common and unclean' than the choicest part of a pheasant?"

She smiled as she put the question; so did he.

"You forget that I am a soldier. I was thinking just now, knowing what a grand point it is to feed one's men well, whether it would be practicable to organize a staff of female cooks who would know how to pick

up what was at hand and make the best of it. A man can't fight on an empty stomach. By Jove ! there goes O'Buncous."

"Oh dear !" cried Adelaide ; " what a mess he will be in. That's the muddiest part of the bank !"

Bathurst thought of the " linen," which was unexceptionable. They hurried to the spot. O'Buncous had scrambled out by the time they reached him ; and Kate's look of subdued merriment amused Bathurst.

" You're not hurt ? " he asked.

" A mere slip," O'Buncous answered. " This lady has been taking me outside my depth." He shook his legs, however, uncomfortably.

" It is unlike your gallantry to throw the blame on a lady."

" But it was all my fault," interrupted Kate. " I was looking for water insects for Mary."

" And now," said Reilly, who at that moment came up, " I will help you to

deliver them ;” and very unceremoniously Kate and he walked away together.

O’Buncous, having shaken away a little more water, found himself signally deserted.

“Yes ; but cooked nettles really are edible,” Adelaide was saying. “We have some to-day. Could you be persuaded to taste them ?”

“I shall need no persuasion,” replied Bathurst, blandly.

“I should think not ; they’ll come quite natural to him !” exclaimed O’Buncous, boisterously.

When he did see a joke he made the most of it, especially when it was his own.”

“O’Buncous,” said Bathurst, coolly, “there is no immediate necessity to inform Miss Elmore of that which you have discovered only on the strength of a long acquaintance. Do not pay her the ill compliment of imagining she will fail to ‘write me down an ass.’”

Adelaide smiled approvingly. “Very

neatly retorted, and I hope the nettles will suit you."

"Come, now, that is almost as bad, Miss Elmore. I shall be afraid to admit that I do like them, if——"

"No, no. Let us hope a man will have the courage to be sincere, however stupid he may be. We don't expect a woman to have courage, but we can't allow a man to be without it."

"Then I promise you the utmost sincerity in future. Will you take my word?"

"Certainly; if you will accept mine on the same conditions. But it's to be only when we are called upon, remember."

"Exactly; that's understood. I wonder how it will sound?"

"Are you so unaccustomed to hear truth?"

"I think we all must be. If we were not habitually bound to use language to disguise our thoughts, it would be a very troublesome, not to say a very quarrelsome, time of it."

“No doubt, especially if one’s circle of acquaintance were a large one.”

“No ; plain speaking can only be resorted to between those who are very dear to each other—don’t look at me with such wonderment ! I was going to add—or between whom there is the strongest interest to understand one another.”

“I am afraid we don’t come within the limits. Truth must be abandoned between us—we shall never have a chance of proving our talents for quarrelling.”

“You have passed your word, Miss Elmore ; don’t draw back ! The prospect of a quarrel is so exhilarating that I *can’t* abandon it.”

Again she smiled. “If you are as vigorous in anger as you are now, I am afraid I should run away.”

“I could soon overtake you. Now, seriously, Miss Elmore, it is not all people from whom one could ask such a question ; but for reasons I can fully justify—strong

and sufficient reasons—I am going to make the first demand on the ground of our compact at once. Tell me, without reserve, what you think of me?”

Now, he expected a playful retort, but, to his surprise, Adelaide's face fell into that solemn calm that made her look like—what he had thought her at first—a beautiful statue. They had been walking very slowly, but now they stood still. Her eyes went into the distance behind him as she answered—

“Honestly, then, I think you are a very good man, although you are somewhat misled. That is the first proposition. I don't assume that I am right; I only think so.”

To say that Bathurst received this intimation in a spirit of indifference would be untrue. All possibility of jest was denied, and he was more interested than he himself knew.

At this inopportune moment O'Buncous thrust his portly person upon them, little

caring what interruption he might prove. He gave a significant look at Bathurst.

“If you don’t find another donkey in the way——”

“You had better take yourself away, and get yourself dried.”

“I must leave the menagerie at present to take care of itself,” observed Adelaide. And then she bade the colonel good morning, bowed coldly to O’Buncous, and went away.

“I hope I haven’t spoilt sport?” O’Buncous continued, seeing a somewhat blank look settle upon his friend’s face.

“Oh, humbug! As I said before, these ladies require delicate handling; they don’t understand your boisterous jokes.”

“Oh, damn it! Come, now, I never expected to be told I didn’t understand women, at my time of—with my experience. They all like to be made much of; they all go in for being admired. The only thing is, they’ve got a different way of doing it.

Bless your soul! I know 'em—know all their ways. You've had very little to do with females, Bathurst."

The major's tone was so earnestly emphatic at this point, that even against his will Bathurst felt some amusement. He laughed. "You really do take a liberty upon our old acquaintance."

"Ah, that's right! Richard's himself again. I say," said O'Buncous, in a confidential whisper, "I went and looked over that one that paints this morning, and you should have seen how she stared at me. By the Lord! there's something wrong with her."

"By the Lord! there's something wrong with you, O'Buncous."

"You're getting confoundedly irritable. Why *shouldn't* the girl have anything wrong with her? I shouldn't wonder if it was the other one, now."

In a cooler moment Bathurst would have accepted the vague remark with a smile.

As it was, he was aware that he did feel irritated, and he could not quite account for the unusual sensation.

“Be sensible, O’Buncous, and go home and get dry,” said he, striding away.

It was a charming Arcadian scene which met his eye as he came up the wooded slope and reached the lawn. There, under the shadow of his mother’s favourite tree, with a sunset such as, in spite of all detracting, is still to be found in England by those who have eyes, a sunset that for delicacy and variety of tint would have satisfied Turner himself, with this gorgeous background as a setting, was a group as lovely as the sunset itself.

“Beauty certainly does augment beauty,” he thought. “I know how fine that boy’s profile is, but it comes out fresher and stronger in these surroundings. I flatter myself I could distinguish beauty among the depths of ugliness, but I will *not* say the delicacy of that girl’s form could not

be ruined by grotesque exaggeration of what is called fashion, or that those bright tints of hair and complexion could not be lost in the squalor of poverty. Ah, this world ! And alas for those who would improve it ! ”

“ What do you think of him now ? ” asked Reilly, in the cheerful tone that indicates complete satisfaction.

“ I want him on his legs,” was the reply.

“ I don’t,” was Reilly’s laconic answer.

Bathurst looked up. Their eyes met, and there was a meaning to be read by each. Bathurst was puzzled about Reilly ; but Reilly was not puzzled about Bathurst.

“ As sure as I’m living,” thought the colonel, “ that fellow’s in love with Ade-
saide.”

“ He’s about—nearly as far gone as to think of nothing else,” thought Reilly ; and then he turned his eyes to where Bathurst had joined Vivian and Kate. “ And that young fellow is in a worse case still,

because the youthful fire has not been taken out of him."

"Oh! there goes poor Major O'Buncous, damp and disappointed," said Kate. She came over to Reilly with her playful grace, saying, "Colonel Bathurst tells us he has been invited to dinner. I don't believe it. But still, if my sister has such a right, I shan't be backward in exercising mine; therefore, Doctor Reilly, will you oblige me? Is that what they say in invitations?"

"May I request the pleasure," prompted Reilly.

"Oh! request the pleasure, then, of your society at dinner?"

"That's asking me to take you in. No. 'Your company at dinner.' And then you delicately veil the meaning."

"And do you require the meaning to be delicately veiled when you are requested as a pleasure?"

"You are too subtle for me," he said, gravely.

She shook her head very seriously, and raised her eyes to his. The denial was absolute.

“You can’t well veil the meaning of those orbs,” he said. “You are more clever at half-meanings than I am.”

“Is it because whole meanings are too big for me? What’s the answer?”

“Doctor Reilly will have much pleasure in accepting Miss Kate Elmore’s inaccurate invitation, if she will first obtain her mother’s permission.”

Her rippling laugh rang out in the still soft air.

“Oh! you will never make me believe such a reply as that is conventional. I decline such an inaccurate answer. Do say you will come; you know it would really be great fun, because we never have anybody but Aunt Flora, and she comes once in a century.”

“You must be very intimate with her,” said Reilly, briefly.

"I will never ask you to dinner again, Doctor Reilly. You are not sufficiently grateful; you are evidently not aware of the condescension on my part."

"Don't be bashful, Reilly," struck in Bathurst, who had heard what was going on; "there will be nettles for two. Miss Kate will do without her share."

"Indeed, you are not restricted to nettles," said Kate. "Adelaide does treat us to the strangest dishes, but she always takes care to have a reserve in case of failure. You will be sure to have enough to eat."

"Then I will support you, colonel; the last clause decides it.—Now, Seymour, I'm going to wheel you in."

Bathurst had been watching his nephew's face with pleasure, noting the natural hue of returning health, and he had observed how those fine blue eyes his mother was so proud of followed this girl's every movement. Certainly there was no wonder at that, for he was a beauty-lover, as his uncle

well knew, and the equal of either of these girls was not often met. The distinctive simplicity of their dress, too, made their easy movements and perfect forms the more conspicuous.

“Then I shan’t see you again, Miss Kate?”

Vivian lingered over that last word; it was the first time he had used it.

“I hope so, I’m sure, if Doctor Reilly allows you out again. We have a garden party every day now.”

There was no covert meaning in the remark. Vivian put out his hand, and Reilly watched her with some interest. She advanced slowly, and he noticed that her eyelids fell. Her voice was so low that he could not hear the words she uttered; and Vivian did not speak, but he never took his eyes from her face.

“Now this is progressing beyond my ken,” thought Reilly. He did not fail to read the sign and token of these small

actions. "It is by the straw we find the current," he murmured.

In another half-hour Bathurst and Reilly walked into the drawing-room together. Mrs. Elmore received them with her usual quiet grace.

"She would do that if she were vexed beyond measure," thought Reilly.

"Adelaide tells me you have really promised to dine with us. I am sorry to hear Major O'Buncous met with an accident, or, being your guest, I should certainly have invited him. But he is gone."

"Do not mention that; he and I can dispense with formalities, being such very 'old friends.' He will take care of himself, I know."

"I have been on the point of asking you to join us several times, Doctor Reilly. I thought the change might be agreeable. But I—you know my reasons—am deterred from natural action, and now this wild girl of mine has taken the matter out of my

hands. How should you proceed to put the curb on that child ? ”

“ I shouldn’t try to do it,” said Reilly, quietly.

And after that they went to dinner.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRST GUESTS AT THE GLADE.

THE lights were set up, although the windows still remained open, and the soft tints of the evening sky were still visible. The three girls were already in the room when the colonel entered, with Mrs. Elmore on his arm.

“It is very unorthodox all this,” thought Reilly, as he strayed in after them, and found, on taking the seat allotted to him, that he was seated next to the very girl he wanted to observe—she who was so remarkably quiet and calm and distant; who wore her long fair hair in a thick plait, ending in a tuft like Ary Scheffer’s “Marguerite;” who wore white still, although she had

changed her dress. It was that creamy tint that accords so well with a fair, clear complexion.

Was she self-involved ? or was she merely nervously timid before strangers ? Reilly knew that a difference of temperament only would account for singular mental development under such training as she had had, and he was deeply interested in the matter upon purely scientific grounds. She did not appear to lack ease ; for the firm, well-made hand so near him moved with no hurried, uneven action. The face was slightly, ever so slightly, averted. Altogether she impressed him with the idea that she wished to remain silent.

A general conversation, naturally commonplace at first, soon became quite sparkling. Still Reilly's companion was silent, apparently absent. One glance at that brow and chin should be sufficient to inform him that there was no lack of intellect in this strange girl ; still her behaviour was peculiar.

He ventured on a remark very quietly ; he almost feared to startle her. "I do not see you in the garden often, except in the early morning."

"I do not go there *now*," she said, in a voice that was soft and deep and perfectly unconstrained.

"Why not now?" he asked, gently.

It was impossible to speak to this girl as one would to Kate, who now sat opposite him, her little proud head poised so gracefully, the rich brown hair coiled around it so carelessly with ringlets that would get loose and stray about on the white skin in quite a distracting manner. Her face was all aglow now. How intensely living she was ! and this girl was an animated icicle.

"And why not now?" he repeated. "I hope we don't drive you away?"

"You do," she said quietly, with perfect composure ; and she did not turn her eyes towards him.

"I shall ask you to taste this wine, colonel,"

said Mrs. Elmore, "because I am sure you will appreciate it. We women cannot, you know."

"And when I tell you," interpolated Kate, "that I found mamma all over cobwebs foraging out this very bottle for you, you will appreciate it still more highly."

"You are always right, Miss Kate. It is superfluous for any one to make a remark when you are present."

It made the mother's heart ache to see how joyfully her child accepted this light talk, the sparkle of conversation to which she was unaccustomed; the light of congenial society suited her so well. She recognized with pain how eminently fit these children of hers were to take their place in the world from which she withheld them, and Reilly's words, which had weight with her, were remembered now. She glanced in his direction and noted at the moment how those deep, keen eyes of his were taking especial observation of Mary.

“Ah!” thought she, with a sigh which was not all of content, “*she* is safe.”

“I deeply regret that it should be so,” Reilly said, in a well-simulated tone of pained reserve.

This shot told. There was a minute’s pause, and Mary spoke again. “Perhaps I ought not to have said that; it was certainly impolite. I am sorry I said it to you, because you are not to blame, and you have had all the trouble.”

He was getting at something now. “I am not sure that any one has been to blame. Both Colonel Bathurst and his nephew would, I am sure, bitterly regret being the cause of any inconvenience to either of your family.”

“You will not tell them what I said.”

They were low, decisive words, not used as a request, but simply asserted.

After this move he extracted only monosyllables. In his heart he was pitying her. “A fine woman—in all probability of equally grand potentialities—completely lost.” She,

he knew, would never desire to break away for herself among strangers, as Adelaide would do ; nor would she ever run counter to the charge set over her, and turn rebellious at a moment and repent the next, as Kate might do. She was a fixed star ; Kate was a comet.

It was splendid wine ; but Bathurst refused to drink it unless the ladies would condescend to join him. Kate protested that she would drink as much as he liked. “ Sometimes we don’t see wine in this house for weeks, and when I am quite flat—— ”

“ Oh, oh ! I refuse to listen,” exclaimed Reilly. “ You cannot pervert human nature to such an extent.”

“ He knows—he knows,” said Bathurst, conclusively.

“ The next time I am flat you shall call the doctor, mamma, to witness an unique case of coma. I hope you’ll administer yquem,” she said, holding up her glass, and letting her dazzling eyes rest upon him.

“Ah, my lady!” thought he, “you are meek as a mouse when you are with some one I know.”

It was true. Her natural buoyancy sank to zero when she was with Vivian, but she regained her impertinence magically when a third person came upon the scene.

The young doctor was a close observer. Finding Mary resolutely still, he let her alone. But after the little party broke up, he managed to secure Mrs. Elmore in a quiet corner, when they had gone into the drawing-room and the rest were occupied.

“Excuse me,” he said, “but is your second daughter reserved and self-involved among her own family?” The question was carelessly asked, just as one might speak of any casual subject.

She started, and gave a rapid searching glance at his face to see if the words were careless. “Ye—es. That is—from contrast. Adelaide is extremely energetic; Kate most vivacious; “Mary is—,” she halted, and

then went on hurriedly—"I'm sure it is the contrast! What have you observed in her?"

"What I have said," was the quiet reply. "I did not wish to alarm you."

"I know that," she said; "but everything alarms me."

"Do you ever find her absent or pre-occupied?" he asked, beginning to feel strongly interested from these evident signs of discomfiture, and hoping he had found a clue.

"Yes, yes," she answered in a low, agitated voice. "That is easily accounted for—she is very studious, she is naturally wrapt in something which is to her of an absorbing interest. I've had little or no trouble in finding occupation for her."

Here the poor lady looked at Reilly, so impatient for a reply, that he almost succumbed. He saved himself, however, and said, "H'm," gravely, while he contemplated the pattern of the carpet with some concern.

“Doctor Reilly, you agitate me painfully ! Speak out. Come into the verandah with me ; it is not cold.”

“These evenings are damp, Mrs. Elmore. You must not venture now.”

It was cruel work ; he acknowledged that ; but was he not justified ? What was wrong here he must unearth. Perhaps by working in the dark he might more readily make the discovery than by waiting for the light.

The lady looked disappointed—he repented. Still he had not wilfully misled her. Was he not working in the dark ?

“Forgive me,” he said, “if I have aroused any—if I have disquieted you. But I really have nothing to speak out—yet—” he added, hesitating.

He looked at Mary as he spoke ; he had a full view of her back hair, the head being bent over the book she held. She was totally unlike any woman he had ever seen, and had no doubt from that very cause attracted his strong interest.

"A *very* well grown girl," he observed, reflectively.

"Yes," sighed the mother. "She has never had a day's illness in her life."

"That is more to your credit than hers," he said, smiling. "I think you said she was studious? What does she study?"

"Really I—you confuse me—for I have, Heaven knows, the strongest desire to answer you truthfully. Mary has such a pile of books into which none but herself ever looks that I can scarcely reply to your question. I know she has taken the oddest interest in insects and such things. Indeed, she will keep them sometimes, and touch them, and speak to them in quite an unnatural way—almost as though they had reason. Kate declares they understand her; but she never seems to care what is said——"

Here the speaker broke off abruptly, but the doctor maintained his attitude of an attentive listener.

"I have never had any trouble with her,

she has always been simply perfect—more self-controlled, more serenely collected than any one I have ever seen. I *never* saw Mary really excited. I admit that I do not understand her temperament.”

“That is not always easy, even under the closest relations.”

“Now, Kate is so different——”

“Nothing could make her unnatural,” interpolated Reilly, emphatically.

And just as he had quietly resolved on another attempt to engage Mary in conversation, he saw her take the first opportunity of quitting the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

PROFESSIONAL INTEREST.

REILLY threw open the window and inhaled a long draught of fresh, sweet air.

“How exquisite is the odour of jessamine!” he said. “According to my notions, now, this would be ‘a spot to live and die in.’”

“Give me a lift over there, that’s a good fellow; I’m just as fond of the air and scenery as you are!”

“I dare say, my dear boy! It’s surprising how affectionate we can be when we want anything. How poor are they that have not patience! Cultivate the habit of mind; patience is most useful in adversity.”

“Oh, come, I didn’t bargain for a sermon.”

“Be civil, please! Let a man pursue his natural inclinations.”

“Certainly. But if one man, why not another?”

“Ah, there you open out a line of argument that moral philosophy has——”

“You shan’t do it, Reilly! My faculties are not equal to physiological discussions this morning. I won’t be betrayed. I want light and air.”

“Sweetness and light! Yes. ‘Light and leading.’ ‘Light and Love.’ How fascinating alliterations are! Oh, you shall not have your intellect strained this morning; I’ll send round O’Buncous to cheer you up.”

“Well, if you want to set up inflammation in the joint you’re so particular about, you will succeed. But you’re not such a brute. By-the-bye, why is that old ass allowed to come here?”

“Well, you see he would be so much alone at Netherby. Mrs. Elmore knows he

is Bathurst's guest, and has tact enough to take that into account."

"Well, am I ever going to that window—that is the question?"

"I *know* it is! It is my place to know every foible of my patient. You are very fortunate in having a man of generous and sympathetic mind to look after you!"

"Oh yes, of course. I say, Reilly, shouldn't you like to know something more about these ladies, eh? Don't you often wonder at their strange ways?—and what they think about us?"

Reilly nodded significantly.

"My uncle seems to have made himself very intimate. But then his gentle manliness must be very attractive to women—don't you think so? I've often wondered why he has not been seized by some strong-minded member of the fair sex."

"Then he would revolt! Violence would never win him. When a woman marries a man, you may be sure the man is a fool."

“You ought to write a book of aphorisms. I don’t believe a man ever was married against his inclination.”

“My dear fellow, the thing’s as common as bread and butter. Thousands of men are not only married, but kept in a state of servitude ever after. Many quite enjoy it. It’s anything but the worst state of life, especially for a man without much force of character. When a woman, you know, assumes the—ahem!—the masculine garments, she usually has the right to wear them.”

“But it seems to go against natural laws.”

“Natural laws are, perhaps, not so well known on some points as others. ’Tis more poetic when the oak supports the ivy, but you know the ivy will support a ruin sometimes. Now I’m going for my constitutional.” And the doctor wheeled the couch close to the window and arranged his patient’s wrap with quite womanly tenderness.

“Thanks; what a real good fellow you

are ! But no practical joking, now—you were not going to send the major ? ”

Reilly laughed aloud. “ I had clean forgotten him ! Well, I don’t understand such a strong animus—— ”

“ I know he’s a harmless old idiot—— ”

“ And that he has the most awkward knack of getting in the way of any man in England. Good morning.”

The doctor, walking rapidly, had scarcely started ere he met O’Buncous.

“ Hi ! stop a minute ! ” he exclaimed. “ Are you galloping for a wager ? ”

This encounter, Reilly felt, was well deserved. He knew it was hopeless to evade the major, but it would be very easy to walk him out of breath.

“ Well, how are you getting on, eh ? . I wish I was in your place. You don’t know how to take advantage of your opportunities.”

“ I don’t know what you would do ; I do as I like.”

Then Reilly's thoughts wandered. He managed to enjoy the beauty of the morning, and console himself with his own thoughts, although now and then there was, of course, bound to be an interruption, as, for instance, when his companion insisted on an opinion. It was true that any reply would usually satisfy him ; still it was possible occasionally to make a mistake.

"It's singular, very, that it should have been in this neighbourhood, where, as a mere boy, I met my first love, Reilly. I don't know whether I ever divulged the circumstance—some things are almost too sacred to bear the light of day. Well, we met, and loved at sight—two young romantic souls. It reminds me of Don Juan and Haidee, now I come to think of it. But her mother ! Great heaven ! to think such a sweet creature should be bound by the relationship."

"Oh ! we must all have a mother," expostulated Reilly. "And remember, there can only be one."

“Don’t jest! my memory is too keen to bear it. I used to watch her window night after night. I was as hoarse as a raven through it. She—sweet angel!—used to peep through the blinds at me in the morning like a bird from its nest. We carried on the courting from the window; that hag of a mother locked her up, bless you!”

“There she was wise,” muttered Reilly.

“What did you say? Yes. Indeed it was a poem. We commenced throwing notes at each other directly we woke, and when either of us missed, the old woman picked them up and burnt them. Language cannot describe my hatred to that woman—although she was a female. It almost became a matter of siege in the end, for we were all starving. ‘If you can only hold out for another day,’ wrote my high-spirited seraph, ‘mother will have to go out for food.’ I’d the making of a hero in me in those days, and bore up well. But I was young and—well, as far as that goes, hunger would tell

upon me now. I remember the cheese a countryman passing in his cart sold me. I hardly think I have digested it to this day."

"Then you never will, O'Buncous," said Reilly, solemnly.

"When at last the old woman came out she had my charmer with her, and there, before her—in the coarsest possible way—she asked me my intentions."

"I told her my position plainly—I had nothing! But I had every reason to expect an increase. I'll tell *you* what I had done, I had ventured my *all* in the Associated British Johannisberg Manufacturing Company. Ah! that was a great thing, a tremendous undertaking! The object was to supply the public with that princely beverage at a lower price than even Gladstone's claret. But it didn't do. Good lord! if it had, I should have been a Croesus."

Here O'Buncous lost himself in the haze of past recollections of blighted hopes, and Reilly appreciated the silence.

Too soon, however, O'Buncous broke out with another erotic revelation. When there was a pause in the monologue, Reilly interpolated a sympathetic "Ah!"

He had walked so far for duty's sake, and now, for duty's sake, it was time to return to his patient. And if—of course the "if" was very doubtful—if he should see a fold of that white dress in any remote part of the garden, it would be comparatively easy to address the wearer now they had once or twice exchanged words. Certainly he had only received monosyllabic replies, given with abrupt brevity. But this harshness was surely all false. Her gentle movements, her fair, beautiful face, gave quite the lie to harshness of any kind. Unbidden, the shadow of this singular young creature had arisen and followed his footsteps; and the cause being so palpable for this interest in a mere stranger, that there was no occasion to account for it.

When they came in sight of that prison-

like gate his heart bounded—so strong is professional interest sometimes. He would have to dispose of O'Buncous, who was saying—

“Would you believe it, now, that riding five years afterwards down that very lane, I met her accidentally—greeting her, of course, as a gentleman would a lady he had once known—with no allusion to the past either by word or action. She wouldn't speak to me! After such passages as those I have related, she treated me as a stranger.”

O'Buncous shrugged his shoulders and extended his hands in hopeless recognition of the enigma.

“I think you ought to be congratulated,” observed Reilly, absently, having no recollection of the “passages” alluded to.

“Yes. No doubt it was a fortunate escape. She was not my social equal; her ancestry was most remote.”

“The remoter the better,” said Reilly, didactically.

“Ha, ha! I don’t see that. Hers was so remote that you couldn’t see it at all!”

“That’s what I should call obscure. Good-bye, major. Tell Bathurst the chicken broth was delicious. *His* cook couldn’t equal it.”

And the next moment he was inside the Glade gate, and the major without, looking blank and dismal.

“Precious airs that fellow gives himself,” he muttered. “I wonder if any of them remember that it was my design that brought about this pleasant intimacy? I’m not allowed any freedom, except when Bathurst chooses to take me in. It’s all very fine to say that Seymour is all their business. They always find something else to do when I am there to see.”

Reilly had entirely forgotten him in the search for a glimpse of a dress he would know by the mere flash across his vision.

“And could any other pair of shoulders,” he asked himself, “carry a twisted wrap so becomingly? It is a pity that so fine a

girl should be nurtured and trained into eccentricity—a thousand pities that she should be doomed to an unnatural life of strange restriction.”

CHAPTER XIV.

STILL THAT "DREAM."

VIVIAN was beginning to look forward to those short broken talks through the window. Kate would always come and speak to him, when she came out, and, although she might only stay for five minutes, he found enough delight to dwell upon for another day. Sometimes she would return before going in, and there would be another rambling talk.

This morning he was very fortunate. He met her with an eager smile.

"I was longing for you to come! Did you know, I wonder? No, you could not possibly—never mind."

After that disjointed speech he paused, with eyes alight on hers.

Kate silently approached, as it appeared, with a reluctant movement.

“Good morning!” he said, extending his hand; and because he did so she was compelled to come much nearer to the window, and even lean over the sill, that he might touch her hand.

“Do you think my jailor will let me out to-day?”

It was so long before she answered that he thought she did not hear. But he was quite content.

“Can’t you bribe him?” she asked shyly, not looking up.

“I? No. You might, now. Would you do as much for me?”

“Would I?” she repeated, absently.

“Would you?” he reiterated, in low pleading tones.

It did not appear at all ridiculous to these two that they were talking so. It was all the same to them what they talked about. The words were half meaningless, or else

charged with more meaning than a tongue could utter. Their eyes exchanged confidences better than their lips ; their own beauty appealed to their youthful passionate senses stronger than any language could.

"Will you sing that song again to-day ? I'm always begging, am I not ? But will you ?

"Which is it ? you like so many."

"That's true. I think I always like the last best. But I really mean that song of Storace's ; the refrain is so exquisitely pathetic. Do you feel the pathos of music while you sing, as much as I who listen ? "

"How can I tell ? But I don't understand any one not feeling the power of music."

"Nor I. Yet some people are dead to it. What amazes me is that you should sing as you do, and yet you have not heard—you tell me you have never heard—any great singer."

"No," she said, simply. "How could I ? Haven't I told you that we never go *any-*

where? Sometimes when I am reading descriptions of plays and concerts, I feel as though I would give up all the years of life before me, if I could hear and see some of those things that great artists can do."

The sympathy in his face was very strong just then, but he did not know what to say. It seemed to him an abominable cruelty that such a girl as this, who was literally all soul, whose voice thrilled with emotion, whose very finger-tips talked when she spoke, should be shut out from the greatest pleasure the artistic temperament can know.

They were both silent for a little while; then, with a half-checked sigh, she said—

"Would you believe—I wonder why it is now—that I invariably feel as though I want to sing *to* somebody, *for* somebody? It is not because I want praise, but I like to give away some of the pleasure I feel."

"That is wholly and purely natural, I am sure. Does any one else in your family so highly appreciate music?"

"They are all fond of it. But mamma, oh! she is ecstatic ; I have seen her break down, and sob bitterly, and go away from the room, when I am singing. I never felt quite so bad as that."

"I have seen strong men affected by music almost to that extent. You have no idea of the effect of fine orchestral music, leading up to a climax, by the grandest instrument known—the human voice."

"Tell me what it is like. It seems to me that numbers of people together must intensify one's emotion. I am certain if I saw many people affected, and I did not know why, I should be touched myself."

"I am sure you would. But even among the most unsympathetic people that will occur. For instance, you can always raise plenty of enthusiasm in a mob. I don't say it's real. There's a very strange thing about that. It is more difficult to raise the enthusiasm of one person on the wrongs and sufferings of thousands than it is to

raise the enthusiasm of thousands for one man."

"Isn't that because we can better identify ourselves with the one man's feeling?" asked Kate, timidly. "You can't follow the sensations of a multitude."

"I think you are right; and that directly we have to deal with multitudes, man loses his individuality; it is merged in the leader."

"Then how great a man a leader ought to be!"

So interested were they that they had not observed Adelaide and Bathurst strolling up.

Kate started as her sister touched her.

"Why, are you settling affairs of State?" asked Adelaide, laughing.

"And why not?" exclaimed Kate gaily, instantly regaining her courage.

"I'm sure no one can answer that question," said Vivian.

"Because there is no reason against it! It is not more remarkable that I should

have my ambition than you yours, Dell. She is getting up a cookery book, colonel. I got at her diary. This is a specimen—it is headed, 'An Economical Dish'—Take a spoonful of cayenne pepper, a pint of port, and a handful of nettles——"

"Kate!"

"I forget the rest. But the dish turns out to be perfection, as the authoress remarks in a foot-note, where she says, 'It had the most extraordinary effect upon Colonel Bathurst, of the 25th Life Guards.'"

"There's no such regiment, Miss Kate."

"Although he highly approved of it——"

"Kate, your jests are not within the 'limits of becoming mirth.' You had better go in. I hope she doesn't talk such random nonsense to you, Mr. Seymour?"

"No, no," said Vivian, quickly. "She talks art and politics to me; I talk random nonsense to her."

"I cannot stay to hear this! I'll say good morning to you all."

And then the two ladies left them.

“What a bright spirit that girl has!” said Bathurst. “She is all fire—all life. Confound it, here comes O’Buncous! I’m sure ’tis he. I’ve scarcely had a word with you this morning—but there, I see how well you’re getting on. Good-bye, good-bye.”

He was greatly annoyed at the persistence of O’Buncous, for he felt that he must himself be responsible for his conduct, upon which he himself was beginning to have doubts. He felt instinctively it would destroy all intimacy at one blow, if he ventured on the slightest familiarity with either of these ladies. He hurried to the gate before O’Buncous was admitted, and joined him.

“I’m deucedly sorry to leave you so much to your own resources; but of course you see that by the laws of kindred and so on I am compelled to show all possible attention to my neph——”

“Oh, don’t, Bathurst! Is it your nephew

you go promenading about with? He can't use his legs—I'll warrant he uses his eyes. And I say, old fellow, is it your nephew who teaches you to cook your own goose? Is it, eh?"

"Upon my soul, O'Buncous, you're positively vulgar!"

CHAPTER XV.

SCIENCE AND ART.

ANXIOUS to arrive at some tangible idea concerning this most interesting mother and her still more interesting daughters, Reilly took occasion to meet Mary as often as possible, and, taking advantage of Mrs. Elmore's permission, always supplemented his greeting by a few commonplace remarks. He had, however, met with the most signal disappointment. Notwithstanding his care and tact, she apparently regarded him with suspicion. This phase he at first accepted as timidity, expecting that if he managed to present himself frequently, she would become accustomed to seeing him, and be tempted into a conversation.

Soon, however, he was bound to abandon the notion that timidity had anything to do with her action, for on closer observation he discovered no trace of that girlish trait. Sometimes her answers were curt to the verge of impoliteness; occasionally they were confusingly vague, either purely unmeaning, or charged with an equivocal sense which he had certainly found mystifying.

After a dozen meetings or more, he had not gained one step; her remarkable taciturnity and the distant iciness of her manner still repelled the smallest advance.

This morning he went out to meet her, more earnest than ever in his interest, but feeling a strange rashness born of his disappointment.

He did not saunter to the spot whither the undulating lines of the soft cloth dress attracted him. Neither pausing to make their meeting accidental, nor to prepare an attack, the doctor walked on with sharp

decisive steps, hot with, of course, professional fire.

“ Good morning.”

Now, what was she doing? Reading, or drawing? The head was bent over the folio she held, and there was no response.

Reilly stood before her with extended hand, looking like a gentleman, and a fine man too, his usually grave face lighted by that pleasant smile which made him almost if not quite handsome, and made his keen eyes more tender and less searching.

Mary looked up; the head was raised far enough now, too far to please him, and there was no answering smile, not the feeblest attempt at one. She did condescend to put out her hand. He had never touched it before. It was cold and rigid, as her beautiful fair face. He was prepared to commence the conversation and to keep it up. What chance, indeed, had he if he did not?

“ What glorious weather it is still! I’ve

been taking my four-mile constitutional, but I'm not in the least surprised that you ladies should prefer these delightful grounds. You can get a good half-mile by the river path, can't you?"

He did pause, and because he paused there was a slight response, although he really could not decide whether it was a negative or an affirmative.

"The slopes are so effective here, and the oaks so very fine. Would you mind my looking at your sketch?"

Again he paused for a reply. She, too, paused. She did not look at him; she was apparently pre-occupied.

Reilly came a step nearer, and repeated the question, and there was just a tender shade of appeal in his voice.

"There can be no possible pleasure in examining the work of a mere amateur," she said, with cold constraint.

"The mere amateur, my dear Miss Elmore, hasn't, as a rule, the vaguest idea as

to his talent ; therefore please don't attempt to judge what effect your work might have on me."

"Are you, then, a competent critic?"

The words were as distant as one might address to a person about to be engaged in one's service.

Reilly eagerly disclaimed. "I have very little knowledge of art," he said.

"Then it is utterly useless my showing you the sketch," she answered, with firm decision.

This was a dash of very cold water, but the doctor threw it off.

"If I were the best art-critic in England, I would not dare to criticise your picture," he said, warmly. "I did not imply that by seeing it I could by any means benefit you ; I selfishly sought my own pleasure, and I am rightly rewarded."

Then there was silence.

"Are you sure you sought your own pleasure?" she asked slowly, giving a glance

from under the half-closed eyelids. She could easily do it, the head was held so high.

Reilly felt that he was getting on. He evaded the direct question by another.

“Do you think people are wrong in seeking their own pleasure, Miss Elmore?”

Mary raised her calm, inscrutable eyes full upon his. They seemed to magnetize him in a moment. He recognized the power and understood it. He could have looked at her for an hour in that way.

“I don’t know that people are ‘wrong’ in anything,” she said, mechanically.

“Perhaps you do not ‘know’; but I said ‘do you think?’”

A long pause, during which her eyes travelled far away from him.

“I do not *think* about what I do not *know*,” she answered deliberately at last.

“Then—I am much interested—excuse me if I ask if you have anything to *think* about.”

“No. My mind is a sort of playground for thought.”

“Very good. Then here we have a basis on which to start. You must believe you *know* something.”

A faint well-suppressed smile, that broke like a gleam of sunshine from a cloud, transformed her fair statuesque features into warm life. But before he could say it was there, it was gone.

“I *know* that you are taking much unnecessary trouble over me,” she said, innocently.

“Why ‘unnecessary’?”

“Is not all unavailing effort ‘unnecessary’? I am acting on the defensive.”

“Why should you? I am not a foe.”

“You are not a friend.”

“I am, indeed.”

“That is nonsense. You cannot care for me in such a way. But, be your intents wicked or charitable, it would be the same to me.”

“You would still act on the defensive? That is a piece of wisdom gained only after

years of knowledge of a bitter and incomprehensible world. You must know something more than the certainty of my failure. I shall get at it presently."

"You will not. I could mislead you into any belief," she said, rather wearily. "Such, however, is not my intention ; it is too much trouble. I came out to read. Perhaps you will allow me to say good morning."

Reilly moved aside and raised his hat without a word. With a slight bow she passed on. Then, suddenly turning back, she said—

"I hope I have not been unkind—I am only sincere. I did not wish to offend you ; but, you see, I am accustomed to be alone."

"Alone with a book is *not* alone. I must disagree with you on that word. It is rarely I prefer any society to my books ; but we can't learn all we want from them. May I ask, before I say 'good morning,' what is your favourite study ?"

A curious half-amused look flitted across her face, and she looked at him in that still, strange way.

“Let me see—my favourite study certainly is mythology. I find it embraces so many subjects and colours such a vast area of human thought, that it is almost as illimitable as space itself.”

The inscrutable expression deepened in those pure grey eyes; it was half earnest, half reflective, vaguely full of meaning.

Before Reilly recovered from the effect of that full gaze, she was gone.

“She’s a deucedly unnatural young woman! But, whatever that girl may be, she is not a fool.”

He walked back dreamily to Seymour’s room, feeling to some extent self-satisfied. He was aware that he had succeeded, and the knowledge was pleasant. But it had been very hard work.

“When he came into Vivian’s room, and noticed the dreamy happy eyes that met his,

he felt strangely envious all at once, and at war with himself. "I have not his bewitchment," he thought, looking at the beauty of Vivian's clear-cut face, as it rested on Kate's crimson cushion.

They were both very silent this morning, these two men, and for some time not a word was exchanged. At last Reilly broke out, as if he had just awakened from a dream.

"I suppose you are anxiously looking out for your order of release?"

Vivian started also—from *his* dream.

"Release! Ah—yes; you mean my removal. Don't you give me cred it, now, for great self-denial in not asking for it?"

"Maybe for more than you deserve. However, I'll admit your patience, under constraint, to be—*abnormal*."

"Psha! How keen you are! It's an implied compliment to *you*, if I haven't been bored nearly to death."

"There's more truth in that than he knows of," thought Reilly.

Vivian relapsed into his reverie again.

“Don’t hurry,” he said, presently. “I could stay here for ever.”

And, singularly enough, Reilly did not ask why.

CHAPTER XVI.

DELUSION.

A GENTLE tap at the door. Vivian looked surprised; the doctor did not. Although it was so early, he knew that it was Mrs. Elmore, and not the elderly stern-faced Hannah who attended upon them.

After she had spoken a few words to the invalid, she turned to Reilly, and said—
“May I trespass on your time?”

It was a halting question, put with such beseeching eyes.

“I am at your service,” he answered, reading her anxiety at a glance.

“Then come,” she said, quickly leading the way to her room; “we shall not be interrupted here. I have been longing for

the time to pass, that I might be able to get some conversation with you. Tell me at once, without fear or reservation, *what* are your doubts about Mary ? ”

The doctor felt a thrill of satisfaction. Now he was sure he had the clue.

“ Give me an opportunity of studying your daughter, and, my dear madam, I tell you positively that I will give you an opinion ; but I cannot now.”

“ How can I give opportunity ? She avoids every one.”

“ For this, however, we cannot blame her ; she has taken her lessons to heart. I shall only alarm her by putting myself in her way. Urge her quietly to be more natural ; we are not vampires. Tell her you deem it necessary she should know me, at least. You have already made an exception in my favour. You have said, you know, that you can trust me.”

He watched her carefully while she strove to command her distress.

“And so I do,” she said, in a low, uneven voice. “I’ll bring her here presently, and do you join us. I will prepare the way.”

Reilly did not speak, but he pressed her hand in answer. When he went back to his room, he was looking so grave that Vivian noticed it, although he did not speak.

Bathurst almost immediately went out, and Reilly heard him talking to Adelaide in the hall.

“Now I’ve paved the way for a pleasant hour all round. I shall decoy Kate to the window, whither she longs to come, but would not venture without my intercession ; and then I——”

“Reilly, have you ever been in love ? ”

Seymour’s mellifluous voice was even softer than usual. The question was put in a careless, languid way, as though it were the commonest thing in the world to ask.

“This is a ruse,” thought Reilly ; and he said cheerily, “Scores of times, my dear boy ; scores of times.”

“That’s a bit of O’Buncous. I am tired of him. I am serious.”

“In that case, you are treading on forbidden ground.”

“Then we won’t be personal. Tell me what you think about love. In all our talks we never happened to strike that subject.”

“All sentimental rubbish, in short. People like to be deluded, and love is an utter delusion. It’s an outlet for the enthusiasm of youth. Not a few people are idiots enough to believe that there’s what they call a fate in it. They will actually press the stars of heaven into their service to prove it. There is no limit to the credulity of man, and love is one of the favourite methods of extending it.”

“My dear doctor, you are *not* deceiving me?”

“My dear fellow, it is evident I can’t,” was the laughing retort.

“When one has talked with a man on so

many subjects, one can make good guess at the view he is likely to take of another."

"I agree with you. Then why refer to me, if you already know my opinion?"

"I want you to ratify my belief, and I want detail."

"Then, on impersonal ground, I will tell you that, to those spirits who are equal to the passion in its fullest sense, it forms the strongest power under heaven. I was not quite wrong in what I said just now, however. To many, love means only that which I then described. It was not invention, it was not cynicism, but simple fact. A man told me the other day, and seriously too, that he was going down to Somerset to choose a wife. He asked my advice on the subject. Now, was it any use my telling such a man to leave marriage alone? He could not have understood me. You cannot imagine a man doing that in cold blood?"

Vivian smiled a distinct denial.

"Nor I. But he was one of your

commonplace, self-satisfied men, who had neither imagination nor sympathy. To him it was quite a matter of business, and he didn't want to make a mistake."

"What did you tell him?"

"I said, 'If you must marry by accident, make it as much like design as possible. Don't choose a woman for her hair, or her money, or the shape of her nose. But see, if you can, that she has a good temper; and if you must judge by a feature, let it be the mouth; let that be as near perfection as possible, and you'll be right.'"

"Well?"

"Next time I saw him he was married, and he was disappointed. She was obstinate and hard; he had no means of affecting her." "You didn't go upon my advice," I said. "There were only five women in the whole place with pretty mouths. I proposed to the whole five, and not one would look at me.'"

Vivian laughed.

“My advice was conscientious ; you have the proof, too, that it was good. These women were all too clever, and had too much heart to accept the creature. Psha ! men love their wives to distraction, but can marry the week after they die.”

“You can’t make yourself a cynic.”

“And I have no desire. A cynic is an unwholesome creature, and I am for health and nature. No, I was not cynical. What I have been trying to show you in a clumsy way, I could have expressed in a moment by a certain French maxim I have just thought of, ‘Il n’y a que d’une sorte d’amour, mais il y en a mille différentes copies.’ I believe that O’Buncous truly thinks that he is an adept in the art of love, and that we are nowhere.”

“I can understand a man being in love, but I can’t understand his talking about it.”

“Nor I,” said Reilly, reflectively, “except in the abstract.”

The young man cast a penetrating glance at the shrewd doctor; he appeared buried in thought.

“You never knew a case of love at first sight, I suppose?” asked Vivian, laughingly. “Can’t say I think a sensible man is likely to believe in it at all.”

When he had finished speaking, he began to shake up the cushions, and was almost preoccupied by the mere effort to make himself comfortable. Reilly waited until he was settled. His expression was impenetrably professional as he answered.

“Yes, oh yes! many times. Given a certain temperament, one expects it. Besides, I have a peculiar faculty for believing what many rational people profess to disbelieve.”

“I don’t believe you. You talk to interest me.”

“You are giving me more credit than I deserve. I am stating a fact. I don’t allow myself even to disbelieve a thing until

I know something about it. The majority of rational people don't do that. Now, you have evidently been under the impression that love at first sight is an absurdity, and are now beginning to doubt the solemn conviction."

This was sailing too near the wind for Vivian's tranquillity. He laughed again, a little uneasily.

"Are you going to say you believe in witchcraft — you, the most rational of common-sense men?"

"I believe in a witchcraft that causes more mischief than any old woman and a bundle of bitter herbs ever did—I believe in the witchcraft of a beautiful woman's eyes."

He would have added "voice," but feared to excite suspicions.

"If such thing can possibly happen," said Vivian, argumentatively, "and we will start on the hypothesis that it does, there must be some occult sympathies, some deeper

forces in our nature, that we ourselves can analyze, much less control."

"And who doubts that there are?" said Reilly, slowly.

"You have studied all these things, you see; but to me they are new."

Vivian coloured, paused, and then went on rapidly, "What I mean to say is—but language runs away with one——"

"*Very* seldom with you," said Reilly, politely.

"I meant to exonerate myself by saying that I had held an opinion, almost as a point of honour, that no man, unless willingly, need ever get beyond self-control, and I did not wish to subjugate my belief in the power of will to your theory of blind tendencies."

"Man is a complex animal; man's mind is a still more complex thing. You speak of blind tendencies; it is those the will has to control. Moral or physical tendencies I cannot destroy, but I may avert them, and

by degrees weaken them. For example, a man of ardent imagination and, at the same time, of indomitable will, may love to a degree that the poets themselves might find beyond them to describe. I shan't attempt it. But this very man, knowing he would injure the woman he loved, would suffer any calamity rather than succumb to his passion. Or, putting it another way, finding her dishonoured, would not hesitate a second to sacrifice the lower passion to the higher—mind, I do not say the weaker to the stronger."

"But you have taken a very high standard for your example."

"I will take another," said Reilly, warmly. "Take a young fellow like yourself——"

"No, no. Young fellows like myself are such fools that even you couldn't manage the contrast. Reilly, what a real good fellow you are to keep me awake as you do."

“Now you can go to sleep if you like. I’ve got an appointment in the drawing-room.”

“Now,” thought Reilly, “he’ll chew the bitter cud of disappointment until he finds the maid at his window.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE IMMATERIAL.

It was a keen scientific interest that this sagacious young doctor took in a peculiar specimen of womankind. He felt sure the idea he had conceived, that Mrs. Elmore was suffering from monomania, was a correct one, and he was far from being hopeless, although he certainly was not sanguine on the case.

“I am sure I am justified,” he said to himself—“sure. The mother herself will thank me if I can bring things right. A stress of trial, a heavy trouble, may serve to depress an emotional mind almost to madness. There’s no harm, any way, or my conscience would kick.”

He had, too, come, too, a very sound conclusion with regard to Vivian, and it had its weight ; for, though the majority of people affect to treat “ a young man’s fancy ” very lightly, Reilly was not the man to treat any excited condition of the human machinery lightly. He knew too much about it. When he entered the room, Mrs. Elmore treated his coming quite as an ordinary thing. He could detect the anxiety in her pathetic eyes, and he could observe the nervousness betrayed by the slight movements of the hands.

There were no such observations to be made on the daughter ; her hands were perfectly steady, and her voice too, as, with a mere inclination of the head, she recognized his presence, and said—

“ Now, mamma, I think I will go.”

“ No, my dear ; by no means. Doctor Reilly has no private communication to make. I feel quite at home with him, you know. I don’t care for you to run away.”

So Mary again took up her netting. It was of strong twine, made with a large mesh, and was evidently for some gardening purpose. She did not look up, nor speak; but she was clearly prepared to stay.

He conversed casually with Mrs. Elmore while he watched her. "A very steady hand! a very fine hand! strong, too, or I'm much mistaken."

She was quite pale this morning, and her slight figure was still enveloped in the plain white gown she usually wore. Failing the matchless charms of Kate, the dignity and style of Adelaide, she possessed an attractive grace of her own.

"You will, of course, experience a loss," said Reilly, sympathetically. They were talking of Adelaide. "But you need have no anxiety. She will not fail in whatever sphere she is thrown. It is few women of her age in whom one could have such confidence."

"I am so glad you appreciate her. It

makes me feel that I have not been wrong in giving my consent. It is pleasant to have an opinion one can thoroughly trust at the back of one's own. I think I will go and say a few words to Mr. Seymour. Indeed, I almost regret that he is going so soon. He has been so patient, and has been so considerate of every one, that it would be unnatural not to be interested in him."

"Indeed it would," said Reilly, warmly.

"I shall soon return. Pray don't move, Mary; I want Doctor Reilly to have an opportunity of knowing you."

"People can't know each other by a few opportunities of talking," said he, with a smile.

Then Mary looked up. Those dreamy azure grey eyes were somewhat different in expression in this bright morning light. How different from Kate! There was no dancing light in these eyes, none of the occasional warm glow of Adelaide's tranquil orbs. There was a steady calm gaze that

greatly puzzled the beholder. This girl was not so silent from fear of speaking, or from want of matter.

“That’s curious fancy work for a lady.”

She said, “Yes ; probably.”

“That is almost saying you don’t know. Yet you agreed with me.”

“I am aware that I have contradicted myself in that brief reply. It only shows how careful we should be in a matter of speech.”

“Would you have us limited to the ‘yea, yea, and nay, nay’ ?” Do you think that ‘more than that cometh of evil’ ?”

She regarded him steadily ; but a quick, clear lightning flash struck from those calm eyes really startled him. It was only momentary, but it told him there was something volcanic behind the calm.

“Although mamma has given you the right to catechize me, I don’t feel called upon to answer you on a subject that solely concerns myself.”

“You take me too seriously, Miss Mary.”

The cold reply almost took his breath away, but he did not let her see that. "I beg your pardon. Of course, I have no right to demand a reply to anything I may say."

He spoke with scrupulous politeness, and then, leaning back in his chair, let his eyes wander among the pretty garden scenery, quietly ignoring her. This answered.

"I did not think you intended to offend," she said; "and I really do not know why I should care not to offend you."

"You seem to be suspicious of me," he said, warmly.

"I am fully aware you have some—shall I say—design concerning me. Not wishing to impress you with my superhuman sagacity, I may as well say that any one, with the commonest perception, might see the undercurrent.

Then she dropped the lids over her perplexing eyes, and went on swiftly with the netting.

She *was* an interesting study. He felt

that he could have watched the rapid evolutions of those fair firm hands for hours.

“What a woman is lost here!” thought he. “Now, do you expect me to deny that?” he said, aloud.

“I don’t expect anything,” she said, briefly.

“How plainly you made your words say, ‘I should not be surprised at anything.’”

“You interpreted both letter and spirit correctly. Did I say also that *you* would not be surprised at anything?”

“I did not read so much; *that* would have been untrue. I *am* surprised!”

And so he was at the turn the conversation had taken. He wondered at that moment what those other people were talking about—those two bright creatures whom he could picture underneath the jessamine window, where both were young and both were beautiful.

Was that the flicker of a smile on the

girl's fair face? He would wait until she spoke again.

Yes. They were whispering, those two, and cooing like a couple of young doves, falling in love with each other with all their hearts, according to the most orthodox canons of romance, and all without knowing it. And then he could picture Adelaide and Bathurst serenely promenading the lawn, unconscious of overlookers. Of course, they were talking about cooking, or the elevation of the masses, or taxation. "What did it matter?" thought Reilly, who could not divest himself of the suspicion that these two were travelling the same road.

It was evident Mary did not intend to speak. How in the world would a girl like this make love? Would a nervous tremor ever pass through her frame and make those beautiful fingers quiver?

"Do you find netting as interesting as entomology?"

"You are sarcastic. I never think of

my netting from the moment I take it up until I put it down. My mind is void."

"You surprise me more and more," he answered, gravely. "I should not have thought so." He was sure this time; the corners of her mouth betrayed the desire to smile, but she compressed her lips, and denied herself the luxury. "And I think you are quite right," he went on. "It is not advisable to employ our mental capacity as well as our physical. Some minds, unfortunately, are not under control as yours is; they absolutely wander when engaged in mechanical operations."

She smiled outright. "I really thought you took that literally."

"Well, you are trying to deceive me," he said. "It is quite fair."

"Y-es," she said slowly and incisively, "quite."

"I think I shall deny that. It is evident you can be sarcastic. I deny the 'quite.' *I* am at a disadvantage."

"You should train your mind to be occasionally void. One finds the advantage of a rest when one has to concentrate one's powers."

"A mind may as well be void as dreaming idle dreams for half one's time ; that is the common phrase of being."

"No ; nothingness is complete in itself. There is only one other condition of mind that can be said to be complete."

"Yes ?"

"Of course, you don't know. The perfection of bliss," she added, gravely.

"Ah, but that doesn't last, you see ; and nothing may. We are sure, at any rate, of two perfect attitudes of mind. You know it has been said that every man who thinks is wicked."

"That is true only as a matter of sentiment."

"Yet man can only reach truth but by thought, and the man who thinks must necessarily think wrongly sometimes."

“The man who does not think cannot be universally right, therefore whatever he may accept must be at least as wicked. I confess I don’t understand how the mere act of thinking can be wicked.”

“Not the act of thinking as I take it, but the condition of possible thought.”

“That is entering upon another question. What we have to deal with is the absolute assertion. Every wicked man who thinks will not reach high, pure, or good thought. Every good man who thinks will reach much that is good, if he should fail sometimes. I deny your maxim.”

“It isn’t mine. I should have thought that philosophy would have been a more congenial study than entomology to you.”

“You can study no science without studying philosophy also ; they are indissolubly united.”

“Another advantage you score above me.”

“That is by your own allowing. You know more than I do. Besides, sometimes

people play badly. You should not let me see your hand."

"Sometimes people don't know what game they are playing."

"That must be very awkward," she said, softly.

"I suppose *you* would not play?"

"Oh no!"

"Not in pursuit of truth?"

"No. I should take up a side and discover all that I could against myself. I must assume that I am somewhere."

"I must admit that I am nowhere."

"I've given you every opportunity."

"You have been very good, if you have spoken only for my satisfaction."

"That never once occurred to me. I resolved to be honest, for mamma's sake; for my own part, I should have chosen to mislead you unmercifully. It is a piece of impertinence for a man to sit down and coolly take one to pieces as he would a clock, and put the pieces together to suit

himself. No. I tell you candidly, I could easily have impressed you with the idea that I was an imbecile."

"You could not," said he, shaking his head slowly; "not with your brows, your eyes, your hands."

"I had forgotten you are a doctor. What are you going to tell my mother?"

"Really," expostulated Reilly, "really—"

"I ask too much."

He hesitated. It was indubitably clear that Mary was not afflicted as the mother was. But how had she managed to engender the same belief in such a mind as this? Perhaps she had not. Perhaps the girl knew exactly as much as he did about her mother's condition. She was quite capable of disguising her knowledge. Again, why should she inform him of a fact that she no doubt would wish to be a secret? Why should he not tell her of his suspicion? He did not see how he could lose anything by it. He would gain if she would work

hand in hand. It was the expression that occurred to him, and he could but admit that the sensation would be a very pleasing one. Such a hand as that could not be picked up every day.

Not yet. He would wait. He did not like to run the risk of a mistake.

"Well," said she, rising, "I'm going now. I should like to have known something about the game. But, although I never played before, I found it more amusing than nothingness."

"I'm not quite sure that you believe in nothingness," said he, also rising.

"You know how to evade the principal point, and how to keep your secret. That's on your side. I'm not going to take all the honours."

"If you are going, 'nothingness' will be left to me."

"Oh, you can fill it up with something. Nature abhors a vacuum."

"That's saying you are unnatural."

“No ; it is saying that you think I believe in nothingness. Perhaps you think that I am an agnostic.”

“And suppose I do ?”

“Well, then,” she said, “you wrong me ; for agnostics assert too much.”

“‘Assert too much!’” he exclaimed. “Why, they deny everything.”

“They assert that they can deal with the material, and not with the immaterial. They assert that they are formed of matter, though they deny themselves any knowledge of the consciousness through which they arrive at the conclusion.”

“I don’t think you want anybody to assert or deny for you.”

“Certainly not. Each individual best knows what he can reach.”

“Do you, then, reach the unknowable ?”

“Any man who acknowledges himself does reach the unknowable ; for through his own consciousness, his own mental condition alone, can he know anything ?

There is not a material object we can reach, but through the medium of the immaterial. I should be more inclined to assert that we can only know the unknowable."

Mrs. Elmore entered the room just as her daughter uttered these words, and they sank into her heart. She paled suddenly, and, to Reilly's eye, looked unutterably troubled as she approached them.

"I hope you have not missed me," she said, in a rapid nervous way.

"What has happened, mamma? You look as if something had taken your breath away."

The mother's eyes went up appealingly to Reilly. How plainly they uttered the question she would fain have asked—"What has happened?"

"I am afraid I am an unconscionable visitor," said he. "I can only thank Miss Mary for giving me so much of her time. I trust we shall extend our acquaintance on a future occasion."

Mary stood with her head half averted, but he knew there was a side-glance at himself all the time. She was quite still, and the net hung over her arm, and the soft woollen dress took such picturesque folds that, once more, he found himself lost in admiration of her superb simplicity. What other woman had he seen beside that vivid picture of Marguerite wear such beautiful hair in this fashion?

Mrs. Elmore was too excited to detain him; so he went.

Then Mary turned to her mother, an untold pathos coming suddenly into those strange eyes of hers, making them look quite misty, and, taking her hand tenderly, said—

“What is the difficulty, dear? I know you have always told Adelaide your inmost thoughts; now she is going, I shall want to be in your confidence.”

“You always have been in my confidence.”

“Until now,” whispered Mary, softly.

“Nonsense, my dear. Is there anything unreasonable in my wishing a man, whom I esteem so much, to know you as he does the rest of the family? He naturally thought that you were peculiarly reserved.”

Mary laughed.

“Now, what may this mean?”

“He *will* think me peculiar, if not reserved,” said Mary.

“Don’t jest about it, Mary. I want you to be serious; and you usually are so. What possesses you?”

“The glamour of society, I suppose,” she answered, still lightly. “Mother dear, don’t concern yourself about me. Fortunately, I have never yet given you any anxiety; and I declare you have no cause for it now.”

“My dear girl, you mistake me, I think. Doctor Reilly is so far advanced in his profession, and has studied so deeply, that I naturally desired to have so good an opinion as to the course I had been pursuing with you. He would be much

interested in your natural history, and all that——”

“He *was* highly interested in my natural history. Oh, mamma!” and Mary put her hand up in expostulation, and fled from the room very much after the manner of Kate, with the net dragging after her.

“Now,” thought Mrs. Elmore, “when people act quite unlike themselves, what can we suggest?” She was puzzled and confused; but after all, she was more than half convinced that Reilly’s unexplained fear had been entirely groundless.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“HOW HAVE I BEEN MISLED?”

At the same moment that Reilly strayed into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Elmore and Mary were sitting, Bathurst succeeded in intercepting Adelaide before she started for her morning walk.

“Yes, I’ve quite finished cooking,” she said, “for the present. I am going to take my usual walk. In answer to your other question, you may certainly come if you like—except that you can’t; for Doctor Reilly wants a little liberty.”

“I’ve just left Vivian most comfortably settled with a book, or rather Reilly has. He’s *his* patient, you know. I dare not interfere.”

And they walked on.

"No one can accuse you of not taking sufficient interest in your nephew, Colonel Bathurst; and indeed, it is not surprising, for he has so many points of interest about him. His beauty is not the least to me, for I consider him perfectly beautiful."

Bathurst smiled at the warm expression. "He's a darling fellow. I *am* much attached to him. Some, however, find a cross-grain, a vein of cynicism, in his character; but I don't. It appears that those who are fond of him are very warm in their admiration."

"That I can quite understand. I can find no hardness in the character; it is a very fascinating one to me."

"I am not so fortunate as Vin. The opinion you gave of me the other day does not read as well as this."

She smiled. "You surely don't think you are worthy of so much admiration?"

“No ; it’s past my time,” he said, enjoying this nonsense as much as any boy ; for he had discovered that when this sedate young woman stooped to repartee, his spirits rose insensibly, until he literally did feel young again ; no pretence of it, but all the buoyancy, all the elation, that goes with youth.

“Oh, that you don’t mean ! Do you believe in the theory that as we are losers of one point of attraction, we are, perhaps unconsciously, gainers of another ?” she inquired, playfully.

“That would make us all more irresistible as we get older. We should have the remnants of past graces and those additional ones you speak of.”

“But those later advantages have not anything like the same amount of power. These arrive from our own efforts to improve. But the bewitching grace of nature, which has been taught nothing, has a fascination no art can reach.”

"Yet it is said that a cultivated woman will do more damage than a simple maiden, however lovely she may be," observed Bathurst.

"It is utter nonsense for me to venture to contradict that, although I still believe that if the young beauty had the same amount of natural intelligence your cultivated dame might possess, your hero—of course there is a hero to your tale—would be in a perilous position."

"Upon my word, I believe you are right! For from those who have been trained in the school of self-control we rarely ever have spontaneous action, and that of all charms is, perhaps, the most overwhelming. That is the case where you seem to see through the heart itself."

"How fond you are of truth! You always seem to be searching for some underlying meaning that can give you a proof you have something true."

"That is so. You have got one part of

my character, it seems. How about my being misled ? ”

Again she smiled. How perfectly easy, how remarkably at home, she felt with this man, whom she had known but a few weeks ! It crossed her mind now, as they talked, the time sped too rapidly, if happily, while she was with him. Her face was averted, and he did not notice the blush her thought called up.

“ It will be soon over,” she thought, with a sigh.

“ How about my being misled ? ” he repeated.

“ Have you had that on your mind ? ” she asked.

“ I was puzzled to know to what you referred.”

“ In the pursuit of truth, then, you have not discovered ? ”

“ I have thought of many things.”

“ Will you tell me what they are ? ”

“ I had an idea you might disapprove of

my having taken up the cause of women—or of my peculiar ideas about property—or that you might think it inconsistent in a man holding certain opinions to keep my household.”

“Well, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you are not far wrong. It is a pleasure to find one’s self able to discover meanings of things for ourselves.”

“But you surely don’t mean that I am misled in everything?”

“Am I upon oath?”

“Certainly. We will never break through that contract.”

“Even if I tell you you are misled in everything?”

“I have the strongest faith in your judgment—and also in my own.”

“That is well put! I’ll tell you what I’ve heard. First, then, you are one of the most eccentric men of the age, on some points; you hold very singular social views. For instance, we will take women. Do you

not hold that they should have equal privileges with men ; that they should never be compelled to do any work of a more arduous nature than taking care of a house ; that you would have them always beautifully dressed ? By the way, that's what Ruskin says."

"That may be, but I am prepared to swear that it is also what I say—beautifully and consistently dressed. Go on."

"And that they might be statesmen if they had the power ; and that they should have every right equal with men. We'll stop there."

"H'm ! That's Reilly's information."

"But you should hear what Major O'Buncous says of you," she said, laughing.

"That's one of the unrecognized pleasures of friendship."

"How long have you known him ? He doesn't know you in the least."

"He never would. He doesn't know himself."

"Few men ever do."

"But we need not be quite in ignorance. But how have I been misled?"

"You will have it! Your first aim, your strongest desire, is to aid the progress of women in every way. You hold, I think rightly, that in our time, with a large preponderance of women, we ought not to employ men in our households. You are certainly right in holding that laborious employment of women should not be allowed. The generosity of all this cannot be denied. How do you proceed? Every man who has an opinion has a right—as I take it, a moral right—to act to the best of his endeavour in defence of that opinion. You dismiss male-servants, and you surround yourself with a number of very beautiful young women."

Here the colonel turned and looked at her. Adelaide was not looking at him. Her eyes were in the distance, pursuing the thread of her argument.

“And why very beautiful young women? Do you think by these means,” she went on, “you are benefiting the sex?”

“I’m giving extra employment.”

“But suppose you had filled your house with women to whom nature had denied the gifts of form and face; if you had chosen consistently those with personal defects, to whom it is never easy to obtain employment;—would you not have been acting a more charitable part?”

“I should,” said Bathurst, stoutly. “But with my—my propensities, I couldn’t have stood it.”

“Propensities?”

“Yes; it’s as bad as that. Understand me, your argument is perfect. So is mine. Recollect, we have no right to have these unhappily ill-developed creatures about us. I prove what things ought to be by what I choose.”

“Then you do choose them? Major

O'Buncous said you did. He said you had hundreds from London when you wanted one."

"O'Buncous talks the—supremest nonsense," said Bathurst, hotly. "I make no personal choice whatever. Mrs. Grove understands a well-grown, healthy young woman. It's true, I mention my aversions. A squinting woman acts upon my nerves."

Adelaide laughed outright. "You take it too much to heart. I did not believe the major. Don't you see, colonel, that these young women would get on quite as well without you? The aid of nature is more than yours. They would be chosen anywhere, at any time. They all marry very quickly, I am told, because, of course, they are always sought. Now, I conceive that they derive no advantages from your system."

"But I do," laughed Bathurst, following her light mood.

"No; that would be saying that your own

selfishness prevents you from aiding those women who more require aid, and who, in a sense, most deserve it."

"Miss Elmore, I shall reform the ranks ; every recruit shall be proved undesirable to everybody else before I accept her. What do you say to that ?"

"I say that we are mixing sense and non-sense in a very unusual way."

"I find it very interesting. You have only begun my list of mistakes."

"I have ended. If you are going to institute radical changes because I hint at an inconsistency, I shall hesitate to find fault."

"Seriously, I have often thought the world gives too little attention to those who really want help."

"I am going into my sphere of action next week,"

"So soon ?"

"It has been arranged for some time that I should go, but my mother delayed ;

now, however, she has written to her friend, who will be ready to receive me next week."

"And Vivian is to be brought home to-morrow. Neville has gone; Reilly will leave soon. I shall be desolate."

"You will have Major O'Buncous."

"Talk of—here he is!"

"Don't you neglect him a little?"

"Perhaps. It will be over soon."

Adelaide noticed the despondency of his tone.

"It does not do to be low-spirited when one undertakes reform," she remarked courageously, conscious of a sympathetic depression. "Suppose you stay and dine with us to-day? It would be a farewell dinner, only—I have no novelty to offer you—only a plain and, I must in my capacity add, inexpensive repast."

"What, talking about eating again?" exclaimed O'Buncous, coming up buoyantly. "You two ought to be able to live on the thoughts of food."

Bathurst glanced at Adelaide, and both laughed.

"I should have thought you had exhausted the subject."

"You can exhaust the supply, O'Buncous ; but you cannot obliterate memory, nor destroy anticipation."

"The subject is an extensive one," said Adelaide, with some formality.

"Now, *are* you teaching him the art of roasting apples ? The first woman began by teaching a man to steal 'em. There are some things besides cooking." And then he looked from one to the other, his great, round black eyes rolling too boldly over the lady to suit Bathurst's taste. Then, seeing she was not regarding him, he winked at the colonel. "There's more things in cooking than you can understand. There's reason in a roasted egg, I've heard—haven't you, Bathurst, eh ?"

"I wish reason could as easily be found elsewhere," said Bathurst, a little viciously.

"Ah! I see the divinest creature in Christendom. You will excuse me, I'm sure."

"Excuse him!"

"Nobody could possibly be angry with Major O'Buncous. He seems to consider the world was made for him. He is as thoughtless and light-hearted as a child."

"I have been in despair," O'Buncous said to Kate, in a whisper; "I thought I should have to go away without a word with you."

"You would have recovered."

"Are you going down the river now?"

"I'm going to be out, perhaps, ten minutes."

"Is that all?"

She shook her head in an abstracted manner. Now O'Buncous began to notice that she was preoccupied.

"Now's my time," thought he. "Young girls are always shy. She's beginning to be afraid of me."

Kate was almost oblivious of his presence. Her love-dream had not come into waking yet; it was still a dream for which she was irresponsible. With that fair aristocratic face before her, and those impressive blue eyes, the sound of the tenderest voice echoing and re-echoing through her brain, she was scarcely conscious of the present.

He walked slowly beside her, putting on a sentimental air, and struggling to keep his waist under firm control.

“How many thousands of times, in the course of your monotonous life, must you have longed for a congenial spirit?”

There was no reply.

Emboldened, he went on. “I have felt so myself; I can sympathize with you. I have gone on for years thirsting for a spirit that would mix with mine. As the poet says—

‘Two souls with but a single thought,
Two hearts that beat as one.’”

He gave the quotation forcibly.

Kate was roused for the moment. "I wonder what he is meandering about?" she thought, catching the last words. "I'll try to be civil to him, poor old fellow! Nobody seems to pay any regard to him—I'm sure you are right, major," she said aloud, at a risk.

"I know I am," said he, emboldened. "I have sought her in all climes—from pole to pole."

"What a pity!" sighed Kate, under the impression that he had lost some one.

"I've sought her," continued he, hotly pursuing what he thought a poetical figure—"I've sought her in a crowded ball-room, and even in railway carriages."

"Ah!" said she, "how tired you must be!"

"Heavenly creature!" he exclaimed, "I can read your sympathy in those very words. Tired! why I should have given it all up, but that something within"—here he extended his hand over his heart and looked

volumes—"something *within* told me I should find her."

Kate sank down upon a rustic seat, and curled herself in the corner, letting her eyes wander on the waving leaves beyond. The influence was soothing.

"How pleasant it would be just now to be alone!" she thought.

Poor girl! she recognized the distraction of her own mind, and did not know the cause; but she was too kind-hearted to show a lack of sympathy.

"I am listening," she said.

"Oh, what an adorable thing is a woman when she loves!" he exploded. "She is a thousand million times more attractive than. There is a softness about her that enhances every charm then. Love, Kate, is the—the"—he was hesitating to see how she took the application of Christian name, and for an apt quotation.

In her abstraction she had not noticed the omission of the title.

"Oh, love makes all things equal!" he cried, with a burst of enthusiasm, happily remembering a line from an old burlesque.

'Kings will forget their state at Love's dictation,
Cabman their rank, and railway guards their station.
Love makes all equal; scorns of rank the rules,
Makes kings and beggars equal——'

"What! why, what are you talking about?" said Kate, in amazement, waking up to the fact that he had lost sight of the lady altogether now, and had launched into the abstract.

"Divine creature! I am trying to give you an idea of what love is."

"It must be very bad indeed," said she, relapsing—drifting back into her thought, or rather into the pictures in her mind, dreamily wondering how a man could talk such nonsense.

"I implore you to listen. You are cold, and Love cannot endure ice. Heavens! what it is to be without experience! You can endure to see me in this state, and not pity me."

“I do pity you,” she said, with some emphasis. “But I should have thought, at your time of life, that it—it,” she went on vaguely, “would not have been so severe.”

“There!” exclaimed O’Buncous, striking an attitude—“there is the greatest delusion of the age! A man like Bathurst, now, doesn’t understand life. With all his ideas of reform, he hasn’t reformed that error. Though *I’ve* been all my life trying to hit the mark, thinking eternally I’ve got her at last, I have found *her*, *he* protests he has never seen the women he would have married.”

“Perhaps he knows what he is looking for,” said she, with an air of apology.

Neither heard footsteps on the soft turf, so Reilly, who was attracted by the major’s spasmodic ejaculations, leant his back against the trunk of the great oak, under whose shade they were sitting, and ignominiously listened.

“I know what he is looking for,” cried

O'Buncous, archly. "Sweet innocent—for no sucking dove was ever more so—I know."

"Then why don't you tell him, Major O'Buncous? It would be but kind."

"Was ever such marvellous innocence heard of?" he exclaimed. "Dear creature! let me be your mentor; let me be the first to initiate you into the mystery of love."

"Major O'Buncous, I really would rather not hear any more about it. I cannot conceive why you should be annoyed with Colonel Bathurst because his ideas do not correspond with yours."

She attempted to rise, feeling somewhat confused by his increasing warmth of speech and his plethoric warmth of countenance.

"Nay, nay!" he cried, feeling sure there was strong tragedy in this romantic negative, and seizing her hand while, with an effort that seemed to invite apoplexy, he sank on his knees before her. "You will not leave me thus. You have heard my feelings for you—I've expressed them as best I could,

though only the heart knows its own—its own weakness. Be mine, dear maid !”

“ Let me go instantly ! You must be out of your mind ! Here have I been listening to your incoherence, thinking that you were regretting the loss of some one who had once been dear to you. In the name of everything that is reasonable, do not suppose that I knew what you meant !”

O’Buncous stood aghast while she uttered these words in an angry, contemptuous tone.

“ I will not betray you, for the sake of the gentleman with whom you are staying, but take care never to address me again, except in common civility.”

Then, with the air of a queen, and a bright angry flush in her face, she walked resolutely away.

O’Buncous did not follow her ; he sat himself down on the seat, and drew a long-drawn breath.

“ And I thought she was leading up to me

all the time. What coquettes women are ! And, let's see, this makes the hundred and fifty-seventh attack I've made on the female heart in vain ! Man may conquer with a sword ; but where is he against a woman's tongue ? ”

And Reilly silently endorsed the sentiment.

It was a malicious feeling to possess a man of Reilly's type, but the thing must be admitted of him. He actually waited and waylaid O'Buncous, eyeing him critically as he did so.

“ Something has happened to you, major, or I am mistaken. You are out of tone, it seems.”

“ Out of tone ? ” repeated O'Buncous, contemptuously. “ How lightly you doctors treat things ! By all that's holy, I'm at my worst extremity. Never in all the course of my life have I suffered as I am suffering now.”

Reilly shook his head. “ You are ex-

aggerating your case, I'm afraid. Not uncommon in patients of a certain temperament."

"I'm speaking of the spiritual part of me!" exclaimed O'Buncous, warmly. "Your heart and soul are buried in your profession, and, as I have often told you, you've not the sensation of a sponge. You're a machine."

"Thank you, O'Buncous; thank you! Now, what of the spiritual complaint you were about to make? I had a case not long ago quite similar. The man wore himself to a shadow, because he discovered at fifty years of age that he ought to have been a Jew, whereas all his life he had been a Roman Catholic."

"Well, couldn't he change and get it over?"

"No. His conscience refused to be quieted, inasmuch as he felt the weight of fifty years of rank heresy too much to atone for. He quietly shuffled off his mortal coil,

resolving, as he told me in confidence, to do better with the next chance he had."

"Then didn't he put an end to himself?" O'Buncous was uncertain.

"I'm afraid I can scarcely answer that question," said Reilly, gravely. "There are so many people, you know, who dispute the possibility of an end—if you are alluding to a spiritual end."

"Your conversation's loose. Well, I don't understand a man's committing suicide on a matter of opinion."

"What! not if it's his own?"

"Certainly not. Well, anyhow, I'm very well content with my religion. There's something to hold on to in the Romish Church. It doesn't give you room to doubt—the law's straight, and there's no dispute about it. If you slide off, you're sure to find the way back. Now, a man might commit suicide on a love-affair; because, you know, there is no royal road to a lady's favour—and women are such coquettes."

“You haven’t been proposing to any one, I hope?”

“By Jupiter! I am consumed——”

“Well, you could afford the loss. Wait till you are half through, and you’ll be a slim youth again. Unrequited love is better than Allen’s Anti-Fat as a flesh consumer.”

O’Buncous coloured, as his mind’s eye descried several empty bottles of the same.

“Major,” said Reilly, solemnly, “you would have a better chance with a lady if you were half your present size.”

“Great Heaven! Reilly, women don’t choose by size—though in my youth my figure was much admired. But experience tells me that women marry *sowl*.”

“Ah! that is a satisfactory conclusion, and it leaves a wide probability to you. So you have been proposing?”

“Haven’t I been doing it all my life?” interpolated O’Buncous.

"I've only to do with one case," said Reilly, tersely.

"'Case' again ; you ought to be put in one yourself. Yes ; the little hussey led me on with her wheedling ways and—and on the hint I spake—" Here he hesitated.

It had taken him a long course of training to break him of that word. "Spake," he repeated. "Hang it all, Reilly ! Shakespeare must have been an Irishman ! That's a proof of it, you know, or else it's bad grammar."

Reilly controlled his risible muscles. "All I have to say is, whether you 'spake' or not, don't do it again, unless you wish to annoy Bathurst."

"Bathurst ! Is he spoony in the same quarter ? Well, anyhow, I've had the first shy, and, size out of the question, he looks as old as me any day."

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